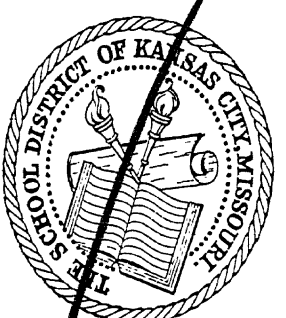
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George Hamilton Combs

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THESE AMAZING MODERNS

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By GEORGE HAMILTON COMBS

Minister of Country Club Christian Church
Kansas City, Missouri



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VINCIT QUI PATITUR

(HE CONQUERS WHO ENDURES)

The privilege of perpetuating a part of the many noble works of Doctor George Hamilton Combs, who is so greatly esteemed, loved, and appreciated by all of us, is hereby acknowledged by the Young Married People's Class of the Country Club Christian Church in the sponsoring of this publication.

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FOREWORD

The "lectures" herein presented are twelve of a series of thirty given on "church nights" at my own congregation during the 1932-1933 season.

Directed to auditors only a few of whom were professional students and many of whom were non-bookishly minded, they are designedly intimate and unconventional.

Both written and delivered in a single season and only as an aside in my preacher-ministry, their hastiness of composition is all too evident.

Prepared for the constituency of the church I serve, their publication is due to the insistence of this local group and of a few ministerial associations before which some of these talks have been given.

Little attempt has been made to change the informality of the spoken style to the compactness of the written form. They appear very much as they were given from the platform.

Had I in their preparation suspected that they would be gathered up in book form I would have been even more careful in the acknowledgments of my indebtednesses to others. I should like to think that all that is set down herein is my direct reaction to the books and authors discussed, but, possibly, of this bead-strand—glass or jade—all

that I can confidently call my own is the *string*.

However, I am sounding no apologetic note. A beaver's work went into the composition of this series and I can but hope that this published one-third of them may be provocative of thought even though it should waken only dissent.

Leaders in the Christian enterprise, cleric and lay, should be alive to the kind of mental pabulum on which the present generation is feeding. May this little book make a bit for this awareness.

G. H. C.

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WALT WHITMAN, AMERICA'S GREATEST POET

In his *Epic of America,* James Truslow Adams has a chapter in which he visions as dinosaurs the huge captains of industry who, in certain decades, dominated American life. It was the lot of Walt Whitman to be born out of due time a dinosaur, a huge sprawling figure, in an era of refinement. Prehistoric monsters may pleasurably capture the imagination as long as they are prehistoric, but when they get out of the Miocenic strata and go charging against a trolley car it's quite another matter. Whitman was such a dinosaur. In the formlessness of his work, the primeval splashing of his verse, his uprooting of conventions and hot breath of animalism, he seemed to his generation a huge hairy human who had escaped from prehistoric times.

Whitman's gothic grotesqueness was all the more accentuated by his utter unlikeness to the New England school of poets that had just preceded him, and that had set the standard of American taste. These Yankee singers, Emerson, Longfellow, Lowell, were classicists, scholars, with the breath of Boston in their nostrils. They were starched with respectability, ironed into the creases of the mode, assailing the olfactories with

almost womanly scents from the flutterings of their poetic handkerchiefs.

Whitman was of a wholly different order. He was, poetically, unshaven and unwashed, intellectually loose-jointed, a scorner of conventions, stranger to college curricula, protagonist of the Left, loud-voiced, slouching, slattern, shocking, his verses as lawless as the ripping tides of the sea.

That word, "sea," is indeed the key to Whitman. The waters of his genius are not sweet, but salt. They are wind-bitten, storm-loving, scented not with flowers but with seaweed and fishes and sailing vessels, and the acrid breath of the east winds. The New England verse is a pretty pool in which lilies dream and goldfish send up their sparkles; the Whitman verse is a waste of waters lashed by storms, shaking the heavens with its obscene bellowings. Whether your interest inclines to Whitman or the New England school is determined solely by your individual taste. It's the difference between listening to the cultured accents of a scholar in a drawing room and sitting beside a sweating laborer on a street car, whose brawling vocables rise above the din of the wheel-poundings on the rails. But there is this addition: It's *talent* talking to you in the drawing room and it's *genius* screaming at you in the street car.

If I were seeking relaxation I'd turn to the "I Stood on the Bridge at Midnight" of Longfellow, or slip into the cuddling arms of Whittier's "Resignation," but if I were seeking mental stimulation I'd turn to the pages of this "free, fresh, fluent—hankering, gross, mystical savage," Whitman, "nude as Adam in Paradise." But with this understanding: Whitman's can be, and often is, an overstimulation. It's the stimulation of "Man overboard!" of "Fire!" of "All to the lifeboats!" On the whole, I should say that a Whitman volume should be placed on a high shelf beyond the reach of children, to be taken down only by adults who will exercise care in their dosages.

Walt Whitman has suffered the fate of all pioneers: he set a new style in poetry and the imitators that sprang up in his wake have done much to discredit the master. And that not because his imitators have been vicious, but because they have been ridiculous. For of all imitations in the world that which most tickles the ribs of ridicule is the imitation of a mastodon. One might give some credible imitation of a bird song or a brook's babble, but to try to imitate the trumpetings of an elephant is to tumble off the cliff of folly and land on the stones of the world's laughter. Hundreds of would-be poets have conceived the notion that by throwing off the trammels of rhyme and writing, as Whitman did, about the robust com-

monplace they would be lifted up to a seat on Mount Parnassus. As a result we have had a world of copyists who have succeeded in copying everything about Whitman save his genius and his song.

The first step in any understanding or appreciation of Whitman is to rid ourselves of our aversions. Between us and the right savoring of his poetry there stretches the wide gulf of our dislikes.

There is first of all our dislike of his savagery, his "barbaric yawp." I am saying nothing on this score that he has not first said himself. Here is his self-drawn portrait:

Walt Whitman, an American, one of the roughs, a Kosmos,
Disorderly, fleshly, sensual, eating, drinking, breeding,
No sentimentalist.

Indeed, no. He has kinship with brute things. So primitive is he that he sings,

I think I could turn and live with animals, they are so placid and self-contained.
They do not sweat and whine about their condition,
No one is dissatisfied—not one is demented with the mania of owning things.

Perhaps savagery is not just the right word—maybe grossness would fit in the better. For Whitman indubitably is gross.

Not that I think it dangerous to morals. There are some of his poems that are disgustingly frank, but there is in them no seductiveness of appeal, because their bawdiness has no broideries of reticence. The secret of allure is in the part-revealed, in the mystery of the shadow, in the borderlands of the unknown. Whitman was ignorant of the charm of veils.

There is also our dislike of his egotism. Milton sings of a paradise lost and a paradise regained; Shelley climbs the skies to listen to the music of a skylark; Byron sings of the sea and the passions of men. Whitman blandly says,

I celebrate myself.

. . . . . .

I know perfectly well my own egotism,
I know my omniverous words and cannot say any less,
I would fetch you, whoever you are, flush with myself.

He is not content with admiring himself or in drawing the eyes of all living others: his ego voices itself in this:

Now, if eligible, O that the great masters might return
and study me.

What a privilege he prays for the great singers of the yesterdays, "O that Homer, Virgil, Dante, Shakespeare should be permitted to come back to

this land of the sun to study Walt Whitman of Camden, New Jersey, U. S. A."

These are the great repulsives of Whitman. They constitute a gulf which many have never crossed. And yet if you have eyes only for the gulf you can never comprehend the man, nor catch the strains of that stellar music to be heard in the Land of Enchantment beyond that abyss.

For Whitman was more than this sum of discredits. He had excellences as overtopping as his faults. There are peaks of nobility to offset the dark abysses. If his feet were clay, his heart was gold.

Let us begin the mountain-measurements by saying that the man was unitary. He was one with his verse. His song was himself. Many poets have emphasized beliefs they did not hold, catalogued emotions they never felt. Not so Whitman. The tick of his brain is in his verse, the pulse-beat of his heart is in his every written line. There is no duality here. Neither is there duality in his personality. Here he is, an animal, and here is this animal, housing a soul. He accepts both. "Materialism is true," he says. "So is spiritualism true." No other man has ever so celebrated flesh, celebrated its hungers and its passions, in verse that reeks of the jungle, yet no other man has ever more nobly sung of the soul.

The soul
Forever and forever, longer than soil is brown and
Solid—Longer than water ebbs and flows.

Nor does he see conflict between these two great realities. Matter is good, body is good, soul is good. They are not at enmity with each other. Neither are they allies. They are twin mysteries fused into that yet greater mystery which is man.

And what is this one man? He is courage. When the trumpet call was heard in the "sixties" Whitman answered, "I am coming," coming not merely to face the bullets of the field but the fever of the hospital. During the four years of that fateful war it is estimated that Whitman, never sparing himself, ministered to not less than 100,000 of the wounded and the dying, to the soldiers who wore the gray as well as those who wore the blue. Courage. "Solitary, singing in the West, I strike up for a new world."

What is this man? He is simplicity, reality. There are no disguises, no maskings even of ugliness. There is no artificiality in Whitman's verse. It is as free from rouge and powder as the face of a fishwife. Whitman's poetry is a tangle of grasses and trees and the wild flowers of the field, stinging in the sweet of its utter naturalness.

Whitman is also democracy. He takes no airs. He looks down on nobody:

What is commonest, cheapest, nearest, easiest is Me.

Nor yet will he look up to anybody:

Why should I venerate and
Be ceremonious?
Having pried through the strata, analyzed to a hair,
Counseled with doctors and calculated close
I find no sweeter fat than sticks to my own bones.

He asks,

What do you suppose will satisfy the soul, except to walk free and own no superiors?

Whitman also is sympathy. This sympathy is the sympathy flowing out of his sense of brotherhood. Whitman sympathizes with the crowd because he belongs to the crowd. Every man and every woman and every child in the millioned mob is his blood-kin.

Take my leaves, America
Make welcome for them everywhere, for they are
Your own offspring.

Again,

I am the mate and companion of people all just as immortal and fathomless as myself.

Another fragment:

I will accept nothing which all cannot have on the same terms.

His identification with others is the secret of his understanding:

I am the hounded slave,
I do not ask the wounded person how he feels—I myself become the wounded person . . .
I am the mashed fireman with breastbone broken—
I take part—I see and hear the whole.

Through the gates of sympathy entering into the lives of all his fellows, Whitman has praise for all who succeed, for all who climb the heights, but on the wings of his sympathy he would bear away and up all those who have been hurt and wounded on life's battlefield, and with the passion of a great loving he cries,

Vivas for those who have failed.

What Whitman's place in American literature and what his significance I am ill fitted to declare, but in my judgment he will stand or fall, as must every poet, by what he has written on these master themes, truth, beauty, love, life. It is by his attitude toward and his contributions to these realities he must be judged. It is by these he will live or die.

The first question we have right to ask of any man is, is he the voice of truth? Does he stand for truth or falsehood? For the cobweb of sophistry, the moonbeams of illusion, or for the fundamental verities of being? Will he bow syco-

phantly before a Lie on the throne or will he stand alongside Truth on a scaffold? In this test Whitman does not fail. Hear him:

The quality of truth in man supports itself through all changes,
It is inevitably in the man—he and it are in love, and never leave each other.

This is no blind loyalty to the past. Ancient credos may be only the stiffened shroud of truth, not its body. Like everything truly alive truth is ever on the march. The ancient, the accredited, may be truth's cemeteries rather than truth's nurseries. Whitman sees this:

How many hold despairingly yet to the models departed . . .
How few see the models arrived.

And truth, as Whitman sees it, is to be arrived at not so much through labored reasoning as through intuition:

Logic and sermons never convince,
The damp of the night drives deeper into my soul.

Himself coming into a knowledge of truth through intuition, he never argues:

I do not tell the usual facts proved by records and documents,
What I tell requires no further proof than he or she Who will hear me by silently meditating alone.

Count this then in Whitman's favor: he is a seeker after truth and sings as he sees.

The artists who live are the artists who have perceived and painted beauty, in whose works beauty is embodied. Ugliness is mortal, beauty is immortal. It is this perception and embodiment of beauty that have carved enduring niches in the Pantheon for Keats, Shelley, Swinborne, Thomson, and other singers of their great company. Rob Rosetti of his beauty and his dream house would come tumbling down. Greek marbles live because they are beautiful. Snatch the smile from a Mona Lisa and you have a dead face.

In the light of this canon of criticism it must be granted that Whitman's poetry shrinks. Over the mountain ranges of truth Whitman races with winged feet, but in the garden of the aesthetic his footsteps are halting and unsure. Whitman's canvases body forth largeness of conception and heroic proportions but they are often lacking in loveliness of line and delicacies of tonal shadings.

If I may again change the figure Whitman's genius is eagle-like in its altitudes and swiftness of flight, but it soars so high and flies so fast that it has no eyes for the flowers in the fields below, and the fainter rhythms are swallowed up by the storming harmonies of the stars. Some of Whitman's poems are utterly lovely and hardly one is there but that beauty peeks out here and

there, but viewing his work as a whole you cannot call it beautiful.

At first glance you might say that it is the unbeautifulness of the primitive and the pioneer. The work of the pioneer cannot, of necessity, be beautiful. Pioneer houses are unbeautiful houses, houses of log and mud-chunkings, houses to shut out the rain and the cold. Pioneer paths are unbeautiful, they are roads to get you somewhere without regard to curve or scenery. Pioneer manners are unbeautiful, the sweat of the clearings of the forest precedes the scents of the garden. Whitman was a pioneer, a pioneer in thought, a pioneer in verse form, therefore rude, digging for foundations in the mud rather than fashioning the grace of a pinnacle. So, at first, you see and say, but that is not the explanation. For at second look you see that Whitman's house of song is unbeautiful not because it has too little in it, but too much. It is not the bareness of the pioneer, it is the surfeit of an uncritical opulence. His poems bog in detail. They are disfigured by the extraneous. Often they are not so much songs as catalogues, catalogues of everything Whitman has ever seen, heard, dreamed of. There are hangings in his dream house as silken rich and lustrous as were ever woven on Persian looms, but alongside them are strips of calico and dirty cotton and grass-mattings and other oddments

that would be more at home on the clothesline than in the parlor. There are huge patches of Whitman's poetry that no more resemble poetry than does a railroad time-table.

In short, he misses beauty by an over- rather than an under-furnished house, a house with everything in it from tongs to pianos, from junk to jewels, from mellow antiques to the shining newnesses of a Woolworth emporium. No, it isn't the House Beautiful. And by so much is Whitman perishable clay.

A man's place in literature is also determined by his understandings, his vocalizations, and his incarnations of love. He is greatest among men who can best measure love's heights, breadths and depths, who can most convincingly speak his mother tongue and whose songs ride most triumphantly the waves of his own blood and constitute the lime of his own bone. Only lovers have lutes. This love is multiform and multivoiced. It is love of nature as was Wordsworth's; it is love of country, as was Lowell's; it is love of the ethereal as was Shelley's; it is love of the mystical as was Blake's; it is love of woman as was Byron's; it is love of children as was Field's; it is love of life, as was Browning's; it is love of beauty, as was Keats'; it is the love of God, as was Whittier's;—yes, multifaced and multivoiced, yet only on these faces where it appears

is there the light that never fades and only in these voices the music that never dies.

What then of Whitman as a lover and a singer of love? The man indubitably knows and authentically sings of country love. His "Chants Democratic" well nigh reach the summit of patriotic music. These are fresh voices. They have little in common with any other hymns to patriotism that have ever been written or sung. They are

Chants of the prairies
Chants of the rivers
Chants of teeming and turbulent cities
Chants of dimlit mines, chants of mountain tops
Yankee chants—Pennsylvania chants, chants of Kentucky and Tennessee
Chants inclusive—wide, reverberating chants
Chants of the many in one.

Compare Whitman's poems on patriotism with other American singers. Longfellow's is the music of the bugles in the Green Mountains. Lowell's is the harmonies attuned to the pitch-pipe of war. Whittier's is the melodies slipping from silver-stringed harp. Whitman's is the chorded majesties of the great organ, with every stop pulled out, of cataract, sea, and thunders, meeting and combining with the swelling orchestrations of the spheres.

Whitman was a nature lover, too, but of nature in association with the human kind. He did not

love nature in the abstract as did Wordsworth. Whitman loved hills, waters, clouds, not for themselves alone, but for their revelations of use and beauty to men. He loved the prairie, but it was the prairie whitened by the cotton-topped wagons of the pioneers. He loved the rivers, but he loved them for the little towns they slipped by and the creaks of the paddle-steamers that churned their waters. He loved the forests, because they furnished timbers for ships and human habitations and echoed to the slashings of the woodsman's axe. A pearl to Whitman's eyes was beautiful, but only when it glowed against the white throat of beauty. He delighted in a flower, but that flower must be in a woman's hair. Had Whitman painted in oils, and not in words, there would never have been a Constable landscape without a human in the foreground, nor a Claude marine without a ship and a man unloosing the sails.

Lover of men and women. Whenever Whitman thought of men he thought of them in terms of warm companionship. The word oftenest upon his lips in addressing men was "Comrades." And it is vastly significant that those who knew him best spoke of him as "Comrade Walt."

In his portrayals of love of man for woman and woman for man Whitman is not so happy. They are the portrayals in the main, of physical root-

ings. His ship of verse has too much of the grease and the grime of the boiler room and too little of the flutter of sails in clean winds. He sees love's primacy:

It is a painful thing to love a man or a woman to excess—yet it satisfies—it is great.

He finds justifications of this love in the world in which we live:

Why should not a man or woman do as much as the seasons and effuse as much?

Nor does Whitman fail in the recognition of woman's worth:

Have I not said that womanhood involves all?
Have I not told how the universe has nothing better than the best womanhood?

But in his visualizations of the "best womanhood" Whitman disappoints us. There are grossnesses in these visualizations which even genius has no license to stress. Reading Whitman's poetry portraying human loves, you have no sense of being inducted into a gallery whose walls are hung with the portraits of madonnas, aureoled saints, or even flower-garlanded women of sweet clay, lissom, alluring, in whom the virginal ripens into sense and purity flushes into passion, but rather into the hurdy-gurdy of a county fair

where sleek animals are the prize exhibits and the atmosphere is laden with the dust of the breeding pen.

The measure of the poet is in all that I have said and more, but is most strikingly revealed by what the singer makes of life. What is life for? What meaning is there in it? Whither is it heading? These are the great questions and it is by their grapplings with these elemental questions that a man's littleness or his greatness is brought into the light of day.

From whence came life? Whitman answers, full-throatedly, "from God." He is amazed that anyone can doubt it:

The wonder is, always and always, how can there be a mean man or an infidel.

Whitman is religious and he wants all men to be religious:

My comrade!
For you to share with me two greatnesses—And a third one, rising inclusive and more resplendent,
The greatness of Love and Democracy—and the greatness of Religion.

Doubt the reality of God and that everything issues from him? Why, he says,

A mouse is miracle enough to stagger sextillions of infidels.

Well then, Life comes from God. Then what follows? That Life is good.

Whitman has faults enough, God wot, but thanks be that this song swash-buckler, of all the singers of his age, has least to depress and most to cheer. The minor poets wail, this major poet knows no dolors. The little lute-men, crawling between the legs of this colossus, are pleased to weep, the master sees the sun. The sun stays up in the sky. It has never set.

> Good in all,
> In the satisfaction and aplomb of animals,
> In the annual return of the seasons,
> In the hilarity of Youth,
> In the strength and flush of manhood,
> In the superb vistas of death.

He has no quarrel with the present over which others are wailing:

> Great is today and beautiful;
> It is good to live in this age—there never was any better.

No wonder that with such an outlook he declares,

> I keep no account with lamentation,
> (What have I to do with lamentation?)

And is this golden-wrapped life to go on? Is life immortal? Here Whitman is magnificently assuring. No other poet, not Tennyson, not

Browning even, has so affirmatively sung of the life that is beyond life. Whitman's assurance of immortality is granite in its basings and star-reaching in its climb. Of those who have left this life he says,

They are alive and well somewhere.
The smallest sprout shows there is really no death.
And if ever there was, it led forward life and does
Not wait at the end to arrest it,
And ceased the moment life appeared.

It is this confidence in life's ongoing that gives cheer:

Do you think I could walk pleasantly and well-suited towards annihilation?

But there is no such end:

You are not thrown to the winds—you gather certainly and safely around yourself,
Yourself, Yourself, Yourself forever and ever.

With such a vista he will go forward with head upreared to the last.

It appears to me I am dying,
Now throat, sound your last!
Salute me—salute the future once more. Peal the old cry once more.

A gallant fighter. Flag flying. No surrender. No surrender even to fear.

So he fought. So he fell. His faults, and they are many, we would bury with him. His excellences, and they are more than all his faults, we would enshrine imperishably in our memories.

His "Prayer of Columbus" is Whitman's own prayer:

One effort more, my altar this bleak sand;
That Thou, O God, my life hast lighted,
With ray of light, steady, ineffable, vouchsafed of Thee,
(Light rare, untellable, lighting the very light!
Beyond all signs, descriptions, languages!)
For that, O God—be it my latest word, here on my knees,
Old, poor, and paralyzed—I thank Thee.

My terminus near,
The clouds already closing in upon me,
The voyage balked, the course disputed, lost,
I yield my ships to Thee.

Steersman unseen! henceforth the helms are Thine;
Take Thou command—(what to my petty skill Thy navigation?)
My hands, my limbs grow nerveless;
My brain feels racked, bewildered;
Let the old timbers part—I will not part,
I will cling fast to Thee, O God, though the waves buffet me;
Thee, Thee, at least I know.

H. L. MENCKEN, THE CELEBRANT OF CYNICISM

Go back fifteen years and on every Saturday night, in Baltimore, in a little back room of a vendor of musical instruments you would have found fifteen young blades who, from two pianos, two violins, a cello, a piccolo, bass tuba, and other instruments, with little care for virtuosity, but with a huge exuberance of spirit, were extracting a variety of sounds which they were pleased to term music. After an hour of such polyphonic calisthenics the club adjourned *en masse* to a near-by saloon where Bach and Percy Grainger gave way to the Pilsner motif. "Picture a butcher's boy with apple cheeks, who parts his hair in the middle, and laughs out of the side of his mouth, and you have a fair idea" of the leader of this group, H. L. Mencken.

If you are seeking other marks of identification, this adendum: he is a German blond, bow-legged and waddles like a duck. If disinclined to stop at the externals, should you cut off his head and pry into his skull, you will see one of the best brain mixtures of this generation. The outsides suggest the cherub, though the corners of the mouth turn down, not up, but the insides are those of the savant.

Let us get this at the start: Mencken is no ordinary man. No mediocre talent could have gone as far as he has gone. When Mencken speaks it is not only the young things who listen, but critics as well, newspaper folk, men grown pale in academic cloister, students of the drifts of the day.

Mencken is a clown, but he is more than a clown. He is in motley, but inside the jester's cap is an egg of wisdom, and there's more than a teaspoon-tinkle in his bells. He is a mocker, but he has girth, tonnage, and there's a Rabelaisian roll to his mockery. He infuriates, as the picador maddens the bull, by the prick of the darts, but just as his bovine majesty, stung to fury, lowers his head and lunges toward his tormentor, this dancing picador is converted into a matador, with sword poised for the death-dealing stroke. This figure would be more convincing, if instead of giving this Americano a sword, you gave him a meat axe. Of the finesse of fencing he knows nothing, his hand longs for the feel of the cleaver.

How much does Mencken know? A very great deal. He made an average record at the Polytechnic, never went to college, engaged early in newspaper work, did his full share of roystering, confronted in his teens the bread and butter problem, seems to have had no long unbroken stretches

for study, and yet somehow has a range of knowledge both encyclopedic and professional. Come by it as he may, the man is a scholar. He has Teutonic thoroughness. His book, *The American Language,* is a monument to his patience and careful research. His literary criticisms reveal an amazing range of acquaintanceship with the writers of many ages and many lands. He has well nigh sucked the dictionaries dry of unfamiliar words. He knows more medical words than the doctors, more legal phrases than the lawyers, more theological terminologies than the preachers, more musical terms than the musicians. I wonder if he really knows as much as he would have us believe. He laughs down a writer on D'Annunzio who does not know Italian; sneers at another who ventures a word on Anatole France, without knowing French; has sport with Howells for having long reigned as an authority on Russian novelists, without knowing ten words of Russian; shakes an Ibsen critic, as a cat a mouse, because said critic could not speak the Dano-Norwegian tongue; yet he himself hands down pontifical pronouncements upon writers in all tongues, philosophers of all schools, musicians of all circles. He pulls Plato's nose, tweaks Lowell's beard, characterizes musicians whom he does not fancy as "pothouse Werthers," whose snorts and moans are as irritating as "the squeak

of a pig under the gate." And all with such air of cocksureness and finality that you know not whether to be angry or to laugh.

But even such a prodigy as he holds himself must needs come into the world by the common way, and so we read that Henry Mencken was born on September 12, 1880. The Fates honored Baltimore by choosing that city as the place of his birth. However he now may hold loftily aloof from his fellows, it appears that in infancy he suckled at a mother's breast, had to be taught how to walk, to say his a.b.c.'s, had to be sent to school, had to be birched, grew down on his upper lip, just as if he were a mere mortal. He was sent first to a private school, Knapp's Institute, then to the Baltimore Polytechnic. Skipping college, at which, he declares, nobody learns anything of consequence, he blossoms into a reporter for a Baltimore newspaper, graduates from that into editorships of various newspapers and magazines, gravitates at last to the Smart Set; attains national recognition as editor and critic; writes a book, conjointly with Nathan, called *The American Credom*—the sweepings of preposterous and outgrown beliefs—turns out another book, *The American Language,* which betrays the glue of the student; gathers up magazine editorials and makes them into volumes entitled *Prejudices;* writes a volume about Conrad, Dreiser and Hune-

ker; writes a book about women; another about religion; writes about everything from ping-pong to philosophy, from gall-stones to God; and has been for thirty years and more an almost ubiquitous gad-fly to considerable sections of American life.

Mencken has the talent to command attention. That is not only a very great, but a very necessary talent. It doesn't matter a particle how wise the word that is spoken if nobody hears it, how important the word written if nobody reads it. How goes that venerable stanza?

> Full many a gem of purest ray serene
> The dark unfathomed caves of ocean bear,
> Full many a flower is born to blush unseen
> And waste its sweetness on the desert air.

Mencken takes no chances on being a buried pearl or wasting his flower-sweetness on the cacti.

There are various ways of securing attention. One is through the revelation of beauty. When beauty is on parade sleepers awake. This was Newman's way, was Pater's. Another wakes to attention through music. Thus did Ruskin, Swinburne, Rosetti. It is a charming awakening. But Mencken relies neither upon the beauty nor the music of his prose, he stings to attention, which of all ways is immediately the surest. So he is horse-fly, wasp, hornet, scorpion, anything

and everything that carries a sting. There's nothing subtle about him. If there is anything he dislikes—doctrine, manner, institution, man, woman—and there are only a few things that he does not dislike—he circles round it with his angry buzzings and whinings, and stings it wide awake.

Mencken is a writer of good English. He is forthright, sinewy, clear, clean-cut. There's nothing soaring in it, there are no grace notes. It is hard, sometimes brilliant, ofttimes metallic. But his sentences are never gummy or pasty. They are as direct as a call to dinner. All in all, a good style. It is just such a style as all speakers and all writers whose first desire is to be understood would do well to study.

He is not only a good writer, but, in the realm of his appreciations, a good critic. In his aversions he is as blind as a mole, saying many foolish things about his betters, but while he has written down many men who can never be written down, he has never written any man up who has not right to be up. He has written Ibsen up and Shaw, and Mark Twain and Poe and Dreiser and Whitman—written them up when some contemporary critics were writing them down—but the other critics were wrong and Mencken was right.

Then he has a good wit. It is true his wit is often poison-barbed but the bow that sends the

arrow is of steel and the string is strong. For examples: "I greatly enjoy chamber music, especially when I am helping to play it." "There are only two kinds of music: German music and bad music." Writing of Shaw's *Man and Superman* he says, "It is a three-ring circus with Ibsen doing high jumps, Schopenhauer playing the calliope, and Nietzsche selling peanuts in the reserved seats . . . a stupendous, magnificent, colossal effort to make a dent in the cosmos with a slapstick."

Here are a number of random sayings:

A Sunday school is a prison in which children do penance for the evil consciences of their parents.

Whenever a husband and wife begin to discuss their marriage they are giving evidence at an inquest.

Men have a much better time of it than women. For one thing they marry later. For another they die earlier.

Man weeps to think that he will die so soon. Woman that she was born so long ago.

Clergyman: a ticket speculator outside the gates of Heaven.

Democracy is also a form of religion. It is the worship of jackals by jackasses.

Adultery: democracy applied to love.

Archbishop: a Christian ecclesiastic of a rank superior to that attained by Christ; see also bishop and archdeacon.

Theology is an effort to explain the unknowable in terms of the not worth knowing.

Wife: a former sweetheart.

Love at first sight: a labor saving device.

Here is epigrammatic wit of the first order. It is acidulous, corrosive, cruel, but it is wit. It is not so feathery-shafted as is Voltaire's wit, but its barbs go just as deep. This ringmaster of the circus cracks his whip and the musicians and the acrobats and the fat lady and the dwarfs go round and round.

I credit Mr. Mencken with graces of character and excellences of deportment, denied him by his enemies and unclaimed, even scorned, by himself. I do not think that he is one-half the tippler, one-tenth the devil in the lists of love he would have us believe. He exaggerates his own vices, part though his fear of being thought better than he is, and part because of his colossal egotism that would have him be first in everything he undertakes, even if it be first in villainy.

Further: I credit Mr. Mencken with absolute sincerity and hold that in his puncturings of hypocrisy, his protests against an unlovely type of puritanism, his warfare against superstition, his ridicule of pomposities and platitudes and pious pretenses, his scorn of subterfuge and the ways of the mole, he has been a breath of ozone blowing through our nation's life and with what-

ever hurt may be found in his wake there is no inconsiderable body of help.

So much for all that.

But although Mr. Mencken has undeniably a present vogue, I do not think he will last, and for these reasons.

Mencken prates of liberty and above all things else would have men free. But Mencken himself is not free. He is in bondage to his prejudices and wears the chains of his aversions. His judgment is ever being hampered by his dislikes. And of all living men he has possibly the largest number of dislikes. He dislikes nearly everything in Victorian literature. Dickens is a bore. Scott is a foolish sentimentalist. Browning ought to be on a pension, Tennyson is treacle, Longfellow's poetry is "pious gurglings," Emerson "drinks at German spigots," but is no great shakes. Kipling has sauce, but Noyes is the bunk. Strindberg, overseas, has pith, and Gorky and Dostoyevksi, but Howells is "an old woman in a night-cap," James Lane Allen "an old maid," Poe "struts his style." Nor are contemporary writers to be shunted off the rails of his dislike. He sees merit here and there—in Dreiser, Huneker, Carl Sandburg, Nathan, Sherwood Anderson —but mostly they are either plow-boy poets or Greenwich Village pretenders, "as devoid of poetry as an operation for gall stones."

Besides these literary aversions he has a flaming animosity toward Philadelphia, which he dubs an "intellectual slum," women's colleges, Vassar in particular, in which he says the teaching directed toward young women is like "giving a display of fireworks in an asylum for the blind." He dislikes lawyers, professors, farmers, preachers, prohibition, the Y. M. C. A., the church, Anthony Comstock, Woodrow Wilson, and all cities, towns, hamlets where there are no speakeasies and where it's hard to get a drink.

No man has inveighed more vehemently against intolerance than he—against the intolerance of democracy, of Puritanism, of the mob, of the church, of the pulpit—but I make no reservations when I declare that of all the one hundred twenty-five millions of living Americans and all its millions dead the most intolerant is Henry L. Mencken. To him there are no two sides to any question, there is only one, and that one is H. L. Mencken's side. Every man who differs from him is a dunderhead, every opposing idea is the bunk. If you dare dissent from the Maryland oracle, said oracle, instead of reasoning with you, trots off to the market, brings back a basketful of fishmonger epithets, and overwhelms you with the nauseous mess. Instead of arguing with you, he calls you a fool in a dozen different ways, and claims himself the victor.

Second, he will not last because he has no serenity. The materials of this lecture were gathered at Pentwater, Michigan, by Lake Michigan. How far away then seemed the turbulences of the crowd. How little seemed our pushing, striving ways. How still the great pines. How silent the stars. How unruffled the skies. Into that great cathedral I carried the works of Henry L. Mencken and when I opened the books the strident voice of him had all the impertinence of a jay bird's chirrup or crow's caw. Isaiah was at home in that great cathedral of nature and Shakespeare and Emerson, but not Mencken. His books were as the pop-pop of seltzer bottles in the solemn roll of a great oratorio. I recalled Emerson's having gone out one night from the sound and fury of a political meeting and gazing up at the Heavens, the stars said to him rebukingly, "Why so hot, little man?" It's just this sweaty turbulence of spirit that debars Mr. Mencken from a seat near the head of the table. He has gusto—gusto is perhaps his favorite word—bounce, go, but no poise.

He not only lacks serenity but is devoid of all sense of reverence. There's not a Holy of Holies anywhere on earth he would not convert into a latrine. Without a blush he and brother George Jean Nathan would foregather in the Garden of Gethsemane for their Rabelaisian ribaldry and

broadcast their Pilsner blares from the hill called Calvary. And it would be done without faintest sense of impropriety. The plain truth is that in the realm of moral esthetics Mencken is a congenital defective. When a boy, Mencken, despite the atheistic beliefs of his father, was sent to a Methodist Sunday school in Baltimore, less for any religious instruction he might receive there than for the temporary riddance of his nuisance-presence in the household. But his only published reaction to that schooling was an enduring contempt for the Methodists, whom he brackets along with clog dancers as his prize abominations. Mencken in the audition of all the finer notes of the spirit has no more ears than a stovepipe. To him the stately roll of organ and choir, voices of praise and prayer, are but as the "song sung by an idiot dancing down the wind."

For example: since the day when on bloody battlefield there fell from the lips of Lincoln the Gettysburg Address, that speech has been rightly reckoned as one of the classic deliverances of all time: noble in its thought, noble in its simplicity, noble in its music. Until Mencken came no man had laid soiling hand on its still whiteness. It remained for this scion of a Baltimore tobacconist to tell us that this object of our literary and our patriotic adoration is cheap as a jew's-harp, as

a thing of music only a second-rate score, and as to thought-content an "intellectual imbecility." And there's a chuckle in his laudation of himself as the first man in the world who has found all this out and had backbone enough to tell it. There isn't an original criticism. It isn't a criticism of any kind. It's an abortion. It's egotism on a drunken spree. It's hatred gone berserker.

Mencken, either as thinker or artist is a stranger to restraint. In thought and style he is too unbuttoned. James Huneker, one of Mencken's pets, says somewhere, "There's a stopping place for everybody, isn't there?" Not for Henry. He can let himself go, but he cannot make himself stop.

Mencken is cruel. Writing of contemporary novelists, Mr. Mencken says they fail to measure up to the masters because through none of their works sounds the note of pity. Yet this which in others he holds a lack, in himself he holds a grace. One of his biographers, Goldberg, writes of him, "His individualistic cruelty is untempered by social pity." Cruel to the individual, cruel to the mass.

There's cruelty in this observation, "Painting, sculpture, music and literature are not for the crowds, but for individuals mostly with bad kidneys and worse morals." That also happens to be a falsehood, but let that go.

There's cruelty in this: "Babies, for example, are too vulgar for me; I cannot bring myself to touch them." And actors. And evangelists. "But in general as I have said I joy in vulgarity whether it takes the form of divorce proceedings or of 'Tristan and Isolde,' of an Odd Fellows funeral or of Munich beer."

There's cruelty in this: "Of Schubert I hesitate to speak. His merest belch was as lovely as the song of a siren. He sweated beauty as naturally as a Christian sweats hate."

And this: "Most of the men I respect are foreigners. But this is not my fault. I would be glad to respect Americans if they were respectable."

These are representative quotations. I could give a thousand others. It will not do to say, as some, that Mencken is not emotional. He is. Hate is an emotion as truly as is love and Mencken hates. Cruelty is kindness gone sour and Mencken is cruel. There's no breath of pity in him. And it's a cold, calculating, philosophic cruelty. Stemmed from Nietzsche he loathes weakness and failure. He is as unfeeling as the axe that sheared off the head of the nobles of France. The only difference is that the one axe, blood-rusted now, is in the Palais de Justice by the Seine; the other, with blood on it still bright and

warm, is doing business at the old Baltimore stand.

This insensitiveness narrows Mencken's range. The cruel man can neither start a tear nor a laugh. Both humor and pathos are beyond him. It is easy to confound humor and wit, but their kingdoms are leagues apart. One great difference is this: wit may be barbed with cruelty, humor never. Humor is kindly and breathes only a genial atmosphere. Cervantes the Spaniard and Charles Lamb the Englishman were both princes of humor, but there's never a sting in that humor. Humor may make kindly sport of human frailties, but humor, unlike wit, never mocks or derides. Humor tickles with a feather, wit sometimes jabs with a needle. Mencken uses only the needle and while, at times, he is hilarious and given to homeric guffaws, he is never humorous. Incapable then of humor, and with fingers too coarsened to touch the delicate strings of the human heart, Mencken's genius may commandingly brawl in the market place but it can never soar to the heights.

But let us come to a more important matter—the substance of the man's beliefs. On the great questions of the times and of the timeless what has he to say?

What does he say about democracy? He says it is a fraud. Recall the epigram I quoted a lit-

tle while ago, "Democracy is also a form of religion. It is the worship of jackals by jackasses." Another word, "I am against democracy: it is indistinguishable from lunacy. To me democracy seems to be founded wholly upon the inferior man's envy of his superiors—of the man who is having a better time." He is for an aristocracy, a government of and by the superior, the few. Yet press him and he is unable to point out any existing government today that is to his liking. All government implies authority and Mencken defies authority. He is for liberty, liberty for the individual, but does not explain how any government can exist without some restriction of the privileges of the individual. The truth is, Mencken is an anarchist, though he may dislike the term. He wants a world without a policeman, without a taxgatherer, without a law. He admires discipline, yet he would boot the Prussian drill master. He thinks this United States of ours has just about the worst government on earth, yet he is out with his shillalah after any man who would try to better it. He cries for reform, yet would scalp the reformer. We have never had a president to his liking, and never will. As for congressmen and senators and such like anthropoids of the baser sort, he would have them go herd with the cattle.

Yet simply because he brings his bludgeon down on all baldpates who hold office and tells the self-styled statesmen to go chase themselves he calls himself a good American. One Newton Alvin, an admirer, has said of him, "He has been a gad-fly to the state, a voice crying in the wilderness, a mouthpiece of the Lord." Lordy, help us. He is not a good American in the sense that he loves our government. He despises it. He is not a good American in the sense that he loves this physical entity we call America. Beyond a youthful lyricism in praise of Baltimore he has never evinced the slightest love of our mountains, rivers, or plains, has never cared enough for this country to tear himself from his Pilsner and go see it. He doesn't like our people. As he himself tells us those he cares most for are foreigners. So far as I can see it about the only thing Mencken likes in America is the joy it affords him of breaking the prohibition laws and telling us to our faces that we are second-class idiots, and that if we knew our places, we should still be hanging to tree branches by our tails.

What does he think about sex? Judging by his close shaves in the publications of the pornographic, I imagine he thinks a great deal which, if put into words, would never get by the censor. Mencken's views of woman are medieval. He affects to believe her man's inferior not only in-

tellectually but morally. She is supple and devious and infinitely cunning.

Men, he declares, do not marry through love or their own seeking, but are snared into marriage by the temptresses. As for himself several years ago he said, "If I ever marry at all, it will be on a sudden impulse, as a man shoots himself." But with Mencken's views why marry at all? This is delicate ground and to put myself beyond suspicion of unfairness I am quoting from his official biographer, Mr. Goldberg:

> I know that Mencken in public and in private protests that he is a violent believer in monogamy and that he considers it the norm of all civilized men. There is a play of words here, however. Mencken winning victories for Christian sexual virtue is even more dangerous to the cause he espouses than Mencken winning victories for capitalism. To be sure, the man is sane, but he is not "safe." His definition of monogamy, though true to the dictionary, flouts our precious morality none the less. Speaking like a philosopher it is monogamy in space but polygamy in time. It is, in simple language, one woman at a time. If that be monogamy make the most of it.

So here we are with more than a mouthful of individualistic ideas concerning women and matrimony. For the life of me I can't see why he bothered to get married, but married he has been since August 27, 1930.

What does Mencken think about our economic system? It's all wrong, of course. He wages war against capitalism. Not so much, we have reason to believe, because he has thought his way through the subject, but because it is a part of the established order and Mencken is against whatever is, save only and always Mencken. He sees as every thinking man must see its injustices and its breakdowns, and yet while clamorous for its uprooting, finds nothing in sight to take its place. He is against capitalism, but he is not decisively *for* any economic system to supplant it. Two things serve as drags on his hearty espousals of sovietism. One, Mencken has not found America the homeland of the Puritans, a lean Egypt, and like Joseph, in the years of plenty, he has heaped up much corn in his granaries. And swashbuckling crusader as he is, he is a bit slow to give to the unwashed the key to his fat cribs. The other: the man is an aristocrat and can never forget that he has right to a crest on his family silver. Such a patrician finds little in common with the masses. Then there comes in also that Nietzschean strain of scorn of weakness and poverty. They are poor, he declares, because they are weak and—no tears—thumbs down for the weak!

What about Mr. Mencken's philosophy of life? His religion? The answer suggests the last sen-

tence in Oliver Goldsmith's chapter entitled "The Snakes of Ireland." This is the sentence: "There are no snakes in Ireland." What is Mencken's religion? Mencken has no religion. He is as devoid of anything approaching a religious belief or sentiment as any huge pachyderm that ever wallowed in primeval mud. But let us have it from his own pen.

> For the religious spirit itself I have an active dislike, but it seems to me that in most cases it is founded on a defective knowledge—that it is, at bottom, no more than a sign of ignorance. . . . The average ecclesiastic seems to me to be not only a fool but a public nuisance. Religion is fundamentally opposed to everything I hold in veneration—courage, clear thinking, honesty, fairness and, above all, love of the truth —in brief, it is a fraud.

These virtues Mencken recites may seem to many a fair substitute for what is called religion, but to those who have waded through his books they seem more like words running out to balance a sentence than the real Lares and Penates of his heart. Mr. Goldberg frankly says that Mencken is "unmoral" and we can but feel that what Dreiser said of himself, Mencken could truthfully say of Mencken: "For myself I do not know what truth is, what beauty is, what love is, what hope is. . . . I admit a vast compulsion which has noth-

ing to do with the individual desires or tastes or impulses."

It is neither untrue nor unkind to say that Mr. Mencken is against everything that throttles his own opinion, his own prejudices, his own so-called liberty, his own captaincy of soul. He welcomes no law, be it of society, or state, or God. He is ten parts rebel. Somewhere he writes that if he had a large estate he would let it "grow up in jungle." He would revert to the primitive. With him it is no "back to a golden age," no "back to Methuselah," no "back to Adam." It is back to the ape and the jungle. If only he could carry his adored Pilsner with him he would go back to eating groundnuts.

And yet as I have already said, wanting his own freedom of thought, clamorous for toleration, the liberty he claims as his own birthright he denies to others, and of all examples of intolerance himself affords the greatest.

This to me is Mr. Mencken's most vulnerable point. I do not object to him because his opinions differ from my own. I do not object to him because he is militant and fights for his opinion. What I do object to is his denial to me of rights he claims for himself. And I object to him because he is no sportsman. In his diatribes against religion he opposes views of religion that are not held by the present-day representatives of religious thought. To oppose religion because of the

theology of the seventeenth century, which I abhor no less than does he, is as to oppose medicine and present-day practitioners because bleeding was the fashion in sick rooms a hundred years ago and in distant centuries healing was sought through amulets and charms. Mr. Mencken gets nowhere in his antireligious crusade by pointing out that the Puritans hung witches. No, he isn't fair. He is the fouler of the theological boxing ring, given to striking below the belt. No sportsman, I repeat, no stand-up boxer, observing the rules of the game, but kicking, barking, biting, blindness in his rages and blood-lust in his veins.

Those who should know tell me that the Mencken vogue is in subsidence, has been for the last three years, and that he is playing to rapidly diminishing audiences. Be that as it may, the end of the exhibitions is not far off. The wild animals will go into their winter quarters, the clowns will wipe off their grease paint, the midgets will find a boarding house, the fat man will pull off his upholstery, the bewhiskered woman will take off her whiskers. And some remarkable day the tents will be taken down for the last time. Will Mencken fold those tents as the Arabs and as silently steal away? Whither?

Was he penning the last lines of his own autobiography when in "Finis" he wrote,

> And the end of it all was a hole in the ground,
> And a scratch on a crumbling stone?

SINCLAIR LEWIS—THE SATIRIST FROM SAUK CENTER

For the first and only time in my life, a few years ago, I met Mr. Sinclair Lewis and, of all places, in this church. He was not here to hear me preach. He was here, near this building's completion, to look at our wonderful auditorium, an auditorium, one may remark in passing, whose dignities of line and delicacies of archings and restrained colorfulness are not appreciated to the full by even our own people. Mr. Lewis, who lays claim to artistry, and has rights to the claim, pronounced this one of the loveliest of American churches.

Though I met him only then I have a very distinct visualization of the man. Tall, six feet two I should hazard; weight not exceeding one hundred and thirty-five pounds; hair reddish; eyes blue, small, deep-set; nose thin and arched; high forehead; mouth wide and straight lined; hands gloved and toying with a cane. He is neither handsome nor ugly, neither distinguished nor undistinguished looking, but physically fixed in the zone of the neutral. So far as went the outwardness of him he might have been an architect in search of an inspiration, or a professor in a midwest college or even a silent and somewhat

dour-faced member of a Zenith Boosters Club, come to show our townsmen the advantages of trading in the Zenith metropolis. By this I mean neither compliment nor disparagement. He is excessive in nothing save his tallness and your only wonderment is how he folds himself up to meet the inelasticities of a Pullman sleeper.

Let me disclaim at the outset any attempt to underestimate Sinclair Lewis. You can't sneer at a man who overseas has by far the most commanding reputation of any living American author. You can't sneer at a man a book from whose pen tomorrow would be immediately translated into a half-dozen European tongues. Limitations may be pointed out, weaknesses bared, but after all your subtractions there is a residuum which compels recognition that this somewhat gawky-looking Lewis is America's chief writing man of the twentieth century's first quarter. This may be either a boast or a confession of poverty; it all depends on the point of view.

Mr. Lewis' literary life, it is said by those who have right of pronouncement, is sharply divided into Part One and Part Two. Part One includes four novels, *Trail of the Hawk, Our Mister Wrenn, The Job,* and *Free Air;* Part Two, *Main Street, Babbitt, Arrowsmith, Elmer Gantry* and *Dodsworth.*

There was little outcropping of individualism in Part One. These first four books are books one reads only after their author has written others which have the stamp of genius. I have read only one of them and that was quite enough. But those who have read them all say that they are in a wholly different vein from his later works, that they are pervaded with an atmosphere of kindliness, tolerance, and are even, in spots, unblushingly sentimental. In them the portrayal of midwest life is rather after the manner of Harold Bell Wright than of the creator of *Babbitt* and *Main Street.*

Then came the great change. Sinclair Lewis was converted. He became a convert to cynicism, irony, dispraise. He was baptized in the river Ridicule. It was baptism by immersion—no handful of water poured on that head—and from that baptism he came forth to be the supreme satirist of his generation. Whether that gospel of satire meant gain or loss to mankind may be in question, but it cannot be in question that in preaching it Mr. Lewis used the most effective weapon at his command. When he moves out of the zones of mocking he is colorless, when he essays appreciation his voice is thin as a reed, but it is indubitably authentic when he says "damn."

In Part Two Mr. Lewis wields a whip with a lead-tipped lash. The first place of flagellation

is the best-known street in all the world, Main Street. Until Mr. Lewis came the best-known streets of the world were Broadway, the Strand, Rue de Rivoli. But now the street that everybody knows is Main Street. It is known all over America, all over Europe, all over the Orient. And strangely enough it is a street in a little town, Gopher Prairie, in the Midwest. The whole world has walked that street. It's a "midway" for the patronizing strolls of all the peoples. Not everybody has patronized the Crown Drug Store or a Walgreen's, though they be found in many cities, but everybody who is anybody has dropped into Dyer's Drug Store in Gopher Prairie and gotten a pineapple soda from its "greasy marble soda fountain with an electric lamp of red and green and curdled yellow mosaic." And by that soda fountain you've met Paul Riesling, who is in the tin roofing business, Guy Pollock, who is in the lawyer business, Erik Valborg, who is in the tailoring business, and Carol Endicott, who is in the uplift business, and various other little men and women who compose what is known as Gopher Prairie's social élite.

Walk down Main Street. I am not asking you to follow Lewis. See it again for yourself, as all of you some time have seen it. There a few electric bulbs dependent from wires crossing the street, which for a half mile or so convert the

streets at night into glaring light islands washed by darkness. There is the jeweler's shop with its window display of Big Ben clocks and glass beads and near-gold rings, flanked on the one side by a butcher shop and on the other by a plumber. There is the livery stable about to be made over into a garage with its half dozen one-gallus, tobacco-chewing habitués. Next door is a single-storied bakery with a two-storied front, which is looked down on by the three-storied dress emporium, which, in Gopher Prairie, is still flaunting voluminous petticoats and out-moded bustles. And so on and on in this charming bazaar until you come to the residences of "our best citizens," which are on Main Street too. You've seen them. You can see them in a hundred Gopher Prairies this very hour, cupaloed, stiff frame houses, with porches all a riot of jiggles and scrolls and dadoes, set at the end of a stiff, straight walk with a circular geranium bed on either side; the lawn exhibiting a cast-iron deer and a white-washed cement basin for bird baths but never with any water in it; two or three stiff little chairs in which nobody ever sits and a vineless, unshaded "summer house," whose only use in the world is a depository for a croquet set.

But don't stay too long. There are other houses to see, though they aren't on Main Street, they're only a block or two from this imperial highway

and may be seen from it—the houses which the Gopher Prairie-ites never drive by when they are showing visitors "our fair city." Houses with the paint peeled off. Houses whose foundations are sagging. Houses with a rain barrel at a corner to catch the "soft" water for the "wash," which lest you might overlook them announce their presence to the nose. Houses with the lean-to kitchens on whose roof the spread-out corn or fruit gets properly dried. Yes, you've seen them too.

One thing you've overlooked, the churches. And to have overlooked them you have overlooked such a congerie of architectural atrocities as is seldom given to gaze of mortal eye. Neither as small as a turkey coop nor as large as a barn, what with their rectangular rigidities, their ridiculous little towers, their bilious stained-glass windows, their cylindrical stoves with their base-surrounding sawdust enclosers, serving as mammoth spittoons for tobacco chewing elders, their solemn stiff benches with their reminiscences of the Inquisition, the pill-box pulpit, their dingy walls boasting as sole adornments a fly-specked Christian Endeavor Pledge, they run the whole gamut of ugliness from thinnest, crackling treble to growling, lugubrious bass and for their outrages on beauty were doomed to live long in a festering memory.

But the ugliness of Gopher Prairie, in Sinclair Lewis' vision, did not stop with the streets and buildings but spilled over on its inhabitants, upon their minds, their manners, their religion. They were physically sprawling, mentally warped, and spiritually ossified. They were superficial and sweaty and vulgar. True, there was the Thanatopsis Club where a few shallow women wrote essays and heard lectures on English poets whose verse few of them ever read and none of them appreciated; but culturally Gopher Prairie was only a green rind. The theology of its churches was as unlovely as the churches themselves. The religion of the town was joyless, repressive, and had no more to do with the lives of the people than the sluggish waters of the conjectural canals of the moon.

Yes, Gopher Prairie as Lewis sees it is in a bad way. Can anything be done about it? The artist introduces Carol Endicott, wife of one of the leading citizens of the town. Carol is an aesthete. She hates the ugliness of the town, loathes its mental slatternliness and its cramping religiosities. And she tries heroically to make the town over. The main interest of the story is in her endeavors to effect a change. But it is an impossible task. Gopher Prairie inertia and Gopher Prairie prejudices are too much for her. Her programs and her dreams are rolled as flat as a

flounder. She is as a voice crying in the wilderness and the wilderness has no ears. She ceases to struggle. The curtain rings down on Gopher Prairie.

Such, in barest outlines, is the book. Who could have foretold its unprecedented popularity? Ten thousand copies are snatched from the presses. Fifty thousand. One hundred thousand, even more. All America is walking down Main Street. All Europe is peeking into Dyer's Drug Store. The papers are full of it. Mrs. Optimus of the Atheneum discusses it. The preachers pounce on it. Some snicker. Some greet it hilariously. Some are as mad as hornets. As a sociological study it is as full of holes as a sieve, but as a satire it is supreme.

Wherein is its magic? Its English is utterly lacking in distinction. It has neither humor nor pathos. It is photographic realism, nothing more. It is a town put into a book. And yet it is a town that doesn't become interesting until it is put into a book. What is there in Gopher Prairie to mock at? True, it isn't a metropolis, but then not every minnow can be a whale. True, being a town it apes the city, but then everybody everyplace apes somebody and some place. True, Gopher Prairie is still in the golden oak era but even England after centuries of culture built Victorian houses and I have seen uglier furnishings in London's

Bloomsbury Square boarding houses than ever looked out from the varnished slickness of Gopher Prairie. True, there is no deep comprehension of "this Mr. Robert Browning," but there are perhaps club women nearer to us than the ladies of the Thanatopsis Club who do not always know what the oracle is spouting.

Culturally, admittedly, Gopher Prairie has not arrived, but neither can you say that art there "is on the bum"—culture is on the way. Golden oak furniture is better than no furniture at all and after the golden oak will come the bird's eye maple and the shining brass and at last the dull glow of walnut and mahogany. Store fronts, too, will change to the better, and ugly churches will give way to the simplicities of beauty. Mr. Lewis himself had passed through intellectual and aesthetic phases exactly like these caricatures and in thumbing his nose at Gopher Prairie is twiddling his proboscis at himself.

Gopher Prairie is fit food for laughter but why the derisive cackle? It is not the necessity of authentic character delineations. Dickens laughs at his characters and we laugh with him but we do not mock. Octavus Cohen, in his Negro stories, his portrayals of Birmingham's "cullud society," introduces us into a circle in which the nonpareil type of affectation and superficiality setting forth the doings of Gopher Prairie give place to circus

letters a foot tall, but nowhere in Bud Peegler's billiard room or Sister Callie's boarding house or in Midnight Motion Picture lots or in the lodge hall of the "Sons and Daughters of I Will Arise" are we moved to derision. Here, as in Lewis' pages, there is satire, but it is satire without a sting. Take Amos 'n Andy. Could a more worthless nigger than Andy be found in all the world? Yet so genial are these artists that even this worthless Andy is invested with a charm. What's the difference? It is this: Cohen and Amos 'n Andy creators content themselves with making their characters gently ridiculous, Lewis makes *his* characters contemptible. He takes you into Dyer's Drug Store for a soda and by a fiendish twist of a phrase converts an innocuous muddy marble topped counter into a malignancy and makes you want to sneak off the stool and forswear a vanilla soda forever. Main Street, seeing it through your own eyes, speaks of the unfinished, but it also speaks of progress and sings with Sandburg,

> I tell you there is nothing in the world only an ocean of tomorrows, a sky of tomorrows.

Then Sinclair Lewis comes shuffling around the corner, waves his wicked wand and lo! every Gopher Prairie-ite becomes a hunchback and every chimney starts to smoking. But it is Lewis

who is blind, not Sandburg. Gopher Prairie has a "sky of the tomorrows" and Main Street leads to the millennium.

Mr. Lewis' next book was *Babbitt* and in every way a more significant book. Lewis hardly gets beneath the skin of the men who press the pavements of Main Street but he gets into the very soul of George F. Babbitt. The scene is laid in Zenith, a flourishing midwest city. It is in marked contrast to Gopher Prairie. Zenith, a city of several hundred thousand, is what Gopher Prairie, what every Gopher Prairie hopes to be. It has factories. It has railroads. It has sky-scrapers—indeed the author grows lyrical over the skyscrapers. It has solid blocks of business houses. It has imitations of Italian villas, Swiss chalets, houses of Spain and Normandy. It has a man-sized chamber of commerce, growing Rotarian and Cooperative Clubs. It has a city-supported orchestra. It has schools of pressed brick. It has churches with tall steeples. It thinks itself a metropolis. There is nothing dead about Zenith. It's a live town. Its Boosters Club—and nearly everybody in Zenith belongs to it—has the biggest banners and the biggest badges and the biggest braggarts ever. Business is on the hum in Zenith. Education is on the hum. Religion is on the hum. Every church has a go-getter for a preacher. The Young People's Societies are as

sweaty and as crafty in their recruitings as the Rotarians. The Ladies Aid is jazzed to a finish. Babbitt himself applies business methods to the building up of the Sunday school. It is considered both good form and good business to belong to the church in Zenith. You can hear the rah, rah, rah of the revivalist and in response to his perspiring persuasions smirking sinners hit the sawdust trail. Zenith, too, is of the prairie and out in the glare of the sun, yet, notwithstanding everything done in Zenith is cloaked. The cloak of altruism is wrapped round business, rapacity on the trot in the name of "service." The cloak of hypocrisy hangs from the shoulders of the pedagogue whose real concern is not for his pupils but his pay. The parson wears a mask, his sermons prepared with his eye on publicity rather than on his people's need and a devout hope when he prays that he may be heard not only by God but by a reporter.

Viewed from a distance Zenith is not without its charms. In Lewis' close-up the siren is discovered to have blackened teeth, a stringy neck, and carroty hair. Herein again is disclosed the almost diabolical cleverness of the author. By the arch of an eyebrow or a suppressed sniff he suggests that all those business houses have false fronts, that pearls are paste, that art galleries house only chromos, that bank vaults are stuffed

with counterfeit money, and that the only realities in Zenith are the ants in the bread box, the cockroaches in the pantry, and the bedbugs in the mattress. He makes even the plain necessities of living seem ridiculous and as you meet the poison gas of his sarcasm in his derisive description of the fixtures of a bathroom you are tempted never to take another bath.

What's the matter with Zenith? Three things, as Mr. Lewis sees it. One of his indictments is true; two of them will not hold water at all. The true indictment is this: Zenith has gone after false gods. It has made of prosperity, of money, of social position, of success a golden calf. It has made of these base things a thousand golden calves. The calf is on every street corner. Bigger and better. The bigger *is* the better. Bigger buildings. Bigger cash reserves. Bigger operations. It is so in the schools; learning is of value when learning helps you to get on in the world. It is so in society; Zenith women are all climbers and she climbs the highest who climbs on a golden ladder.

It is so in the churches; religion is in health when a lot of people come to church, when the treasury is fat, when fashion struts the aisle, when the mayor of the city regularly claims his pew.

This indictment is true, tragically true. Sinclair Lewis has come to join the prophets.

His other two indictments are without justification. Though it can be found only between the lines, Lewis is just "plain disgusted" with Zenith because it is "*new.*" He could bear the replicas of European buildings if only they had a little ivy on the walls. He objects to the millionaire, not because he has made his millions but because he made them only yesterday. He sneers at the skyscrapers, not because they split the sky but because their walls are not yet grimed with smoke.

Now this is a very freakish thing. In the domain of thought that which appeals to Lewis is not age but newness. For an idea old enough to grow a mustache he would not give a tuppence, to an idea not yet out of its diapers he pledges his devotion. Yet while new thoughts are to be welcomed new wealth is to be cast on the ash pile.

Lewis scorns all this just-arrivedness, I think, because he himself has just arrived and this knowledge that he is a newcomer is not to his liking. If he could only detach himself from this western milieu, if only he had come from some old world family and country, everything would be quite different.

Under such circumstances much that is now to him only starkly vulgar would seem naïve and picturesque. But no, he is part and parcel of it

all. Lewis came from Zenith, but Lewis was born in Gopher Prairie. And he scorns Gopher Prairie the more because it reminds him that there was a period in his own life when he joyed in an all-day sucker, thought peanut hulls a celestial litter, remembers his first sight of a finger bowl and the taste of his first grapefruit.

But while Lewis sees Zenith through jaundiced eyes, he sees the soul of Babbitt with amazing clarity and paints it with a fidelity of the heaven-born artist. Babbitt lives in Zenith. Babbitt *is* Zenith. He is the symbol of its materialism, the incarnation of its cheap success. Babbitt has "arrived," but tragically enough he has little satisfaction in his arrival. Crowds are there to cheer him, flags flutter, bands blare, and there are vociferous welcomings to "our first citizens," but somehow the "zip" isn't there. But let Lewis himself tell the story.

He lay on the sleeping porch and watched the winter sun slide along the taut curtains, turning their ruddy khaki to pale blood red. . . . He was conscious of life and a little sad . . . . he beheld and half admitted that he beheld his way of life as incredibly mechanical—mechanical business—a brisk selling of trade-built houses; mechanical religion—a dry, hard church, shut off from the real life of the street, inhumanly respectable as a top-hat; mechanical golf and dinner parties and bridge and conversation . . . . it

was coming to him that perhaps all of life as he knew it and vigorously preached it was futile: that heaven as portrayed by the Reverend John Dennison Drew was neither very profitable nor very interesting: that he hadn't much pleasure out of making money: that it was of doubtful worth to rear children merely that they might rear children who would rear children. What was it all about?

What did he want? He didn't know. He tried drink, a closed door. He tried philandering, no enduring satisfaction. He tried the pap of liberalism, no substance. He didn't know what he wanted and he couldn't find out. What was it all about?

In response to his cry the Sphinx, drowsing in the desert sands, never so much as moved her dusty lips. The curtain falls on his futile whys.

Then came *Arrowsmith*. With *Arrowsmith* we move out and up into a larger circle. We have left Gopher Prairie behind us, we have outgrown Zenith. We are in an eastern metropolis. We are in the company now, not of the village "yokels" or the Rotarians, but of scholars, savants, captains of science. Here, at last, is a something to look up to. We have looked down on the village aspiring to be a city, we have looked down on the city aspiring to be a metropolis. But now we are in the metropolis itself, the Ultima Thule. But somehow while the air is thinner it

doesn't seem any purer. The central figure of the story is a physician, a scientist who is all out for pure learning, for research, whose only object is the good of mankind untainted by the consideration of publicities or profits. But the bacteriologist in *Arrowsmith* finds his fellow workers in the metropolis all Gopher Prairie-ites under the skin. They are as cheap in their self-seekings, as noisy in their self-exploitations, as vulgar in their whoop-it-up procedures, as were the Boosters in Zenith where you might have seen

> the lithograph of a smirking young woman with cheery cheeks who proclaimed the exalted poetry of advertising, "my tootsies never got hep to what pedal perfection was till I got a pair of clever, classy Cleopatra Shoes."

In Gopher Prairie Lewis debunked the village. In *Babbitt* he debunked the little sized city. In *Arrowsmith* he debunked the metropolis.

In his next book, *Elmer Gantry,* moving up from high to higher, Lewis debunks himself. Not that he means to. He aimed at debunking religion, he succeeded in debunking Sinclair Lewis! Not Lewis the religionist, but Lewis the artist. Stinging as a mosquito in Gopher Prairie ponds, snapping as a mud turtle in Zenith waters, savage as a shark in the sea that slaps the eastern me-

tropolis, in *Elmer Gantry* he sinks to the level of the fishwife and becomes only a common scold. *Elmer Gantry* is purportedly the delineation of a preacher. Now there are joints in the armor of the preacher which the feathered arrows of the critic might easily have found, for unfortunately, the stuff out of which parsons of all grades are made is just man stuff, just the same sort of clay out of which saints and sinners, martyrs and rapscallions, even Sinclair Lewis is modeled. But instead of flying his arrows of sarcasm or thrusting with needle-pointed sword, Lewis gone berserker lays hold of a knotted maul and with mighty grunts he brings it down on the heads of shadows! There's nothing Homeric in it, no swing of battle axe, no clash of shields—it's the writhings of the medicine man in the war dance, a battle in which the weapons are the smells of grease and sweat. The only reality in *Elmer Gantry* is stench. For Elmer Gantry is not just a bad man. Elmer Gantry is no man at all. Elmer Gantry is only a hunk of carrion floating on the greasy waters of the diseased imaginings of Sinclair Lewis. As I have said I am not evaluating this book from the standpoint of morals or of religion. I am considering it only as a work of art. And as a work of art it is as grotesque as the stone idols of Patagonia. Elmer Gantry's putridities are no

indictment of religion, they are the odoriferous condemnation of the gentleman from Sauk Center.

When in a speech from a church platform in this city Mr. Lewis himself drew out his watch and noting the time, declared he would give God Almighty ten minutes in which to strike him dead, he was but the ensmalled replica of Mr. Robert Ingersoll, who had pulled off precisely the same stunt. While he was looking at his watch and bidding God to do his worst, we didn't shudder, we only snickered. When he did that he was only cheap, cheap, yet hygienic. But when he wrote *Elmer Gantry* it was an affront not to our judgments but to our noses. Read *Main Street, Babbitt, Arrowsmith,* and there is in your mind the clash of conflicting estimates of their worth, the recognition of talent in the author, talent of the first order, and the sorrow over his failure to find the good anywhere or, maybe, a fleeting suspicion that there *isn't* any good in Gopher Prairie, in *Babbitt,* in *Arrowsmith,* that there isn't a triumphant good anywhere. But read *Elmer Gantry* and you feel that the only fit thing to do is to take a bath. Gibbon's universal history has the resounding title of *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire.* The first three books I have mentioned record the rise of Sinclair Lewis, *Elmer Gantry* records his fall.

Will he rise again? I can but feel that he will. Mr. Lewis is yet on the right side of the fifties, he is a man of parts. He may or may not be a genius but he has talent. He is a hard worker and has limitless ambition. He must realize that his place in literature is not yet secure. Even the Nobel Prize does not spell immortality. For one I remain unconvinced by that testimonial handed down from Olympus. The committee that awarded the prize is composed of the representatives of several nations. Though these committeemen are scholars they are yet human. They have conceived America pretty much in the same terms as Lewis. We are raw Americans—we are raw, not mellow. We are superficial, we are money grubbers. We do not know what to do with our leisure. This is what they think of us and I submit that when a lanky, freckle-faced mid-westerner writes a book burlesquing America and telling them that all they think is true, it is a very natural thing for them to hold that a man who thus confirms them in their estimates is a genius and that they should award him a prize.

If Mr. Lewis lives he will live by a work he has yet to do. If he lives he will live as a rebel. He is the vogue only as an iconoclast. He will never get anywhere as a conformist. His supreme gift is that of the satirist. In psychological char-

acterizations he has not the touch of the master. He has no grace of kindly humor. Sardonic, he cannot smile. To airy grace of style he is a stranger. His prose has no more music than a pump. Nor as yet have any huge blocks of granite thought come from his quarry, much less a monolith of systematic thought. I repeat, he is shut up to satire as his one great gift.

But what is left for him to satirize? He has debunked town, city, metropolis, business organizations, cultural societies, professional clubs, schools, religion. What is there left? The democratic state. He can satirize the state. He can identify himself with the socialists. He can link himself with the anarchists. He will do neither. For by the whimsy of circumstance Mr. Lewis, railing against wealth, has become wealthy himself, has found himself sitting by the side of Babbitt at the banquet. The lone coyote of the plains has become a lion. The unknown who tilted furiously in the tourney against the Count Boeufs of Privilege now that the visor is down is seen to be a prince, lording it over spacious demesnes. The rebel is hoist by his own petard. The snake has swallowed its own tail.

Mr. Lewis maybe in coming books may throw rocks now and then at the windows of the capitalistic temple, but he will place no bombs under its

door sill. His zeal of destruction will be tempered by a great prudence. If he lights the first of rebellion in one chapter, he will promptly put it out in the next. What then will he do? Futile and maybe silly questionings, for who shall set bounds to a winged mind?

THEODORE DREISER AND JAMES BRANCH CABELL—THE UNHEAVENLY TWINS

To those who have only a bowing acquaintanceship with Theodore Dreiser and James Branch Cabell, any assumption of their oneness may appear both unreal and far-fetched. They were not born of the same parents, nor at the same place, nor at the same time. They don't look alike or talk alike or act alike. They no more resemble each other than Mencken and a Methodist.

Cabell was born in Virginia and is of the F. F. V.'s; Dreiser was born in Indiana and is of carrot and cabbage ancestry. Cabell has the walk of the aristocrat; Dreiser the shuffle of the panhandler. Cabell brings into the drawing room the scents of the Rue de la Paix; Dreiser the odors of the barnyard.

Different blood strains course through their veins. Cabell is the child of the English cavaliers, Dreiser the descendant of German peasants. Their early training and environment have nothing in common. Cabell is the finished product of the university, Dreiser had but little more of educational advantages than had Lincoln. Cabell in his youth hobnobbed with the patricians, Dreiser consorted with the unwashed plebs.

There is no kinship in their uses of words, in that indefinable, elusive something we call style. All who have ever written about Cabell and Dreiser agree that Cabell's prose is distinguished and that Dreiser's is just about the worst ever. Mr. Mencken, who claims to have been of the few who first discovered Dreiser, who in his laudations goes so far as to say that *Jennie Gerhardt* is the greatest novel of this generation, says, "There are passages so clumsy, so inept, so irritating that they seem almost unbelievable . . . awkward, platitudinous marginalia . . . sodium hyposulphite."

But Cabell, on the contrary, is a stylist, after the manner of Pater and Moore and Henry James. Passing from Dreiser to Cabell is like going out of a kitchen into a conservatory. Dreiser handles words as a cook handles pots, Cabell as a florist an orchid. The Virginian is fond of gold-lace words and tall words and words with music in them. Or if you want a professor to tell you just the lay of the land let us hear from Mr. Beach of the University of Chicago, who says that Cabell writes

> in the characteristic manner of a scientific age, that hesitating and hair-splitting manner of men seeking the last refinement of truth, full of reservations and after-thoughts and with every grade of subordination duly recorded in the flexible medium of adverbial modifiers.

Dreiser and Cabell are dissimilar in their theme-treatments and in their intents and moods. Cabell is gay, insouciant, debonaire; Dreiser is solemn and serious and sombre. Cabell wields a rapier; Dreiser a club. Cabell's is the voice of a mocker; Dreiser's a wounded and infuriated beast. Cabell relies upon skill; Dreiser upon weight and mass. Cabell holds himself aloof from his creations and you can conceive him slitting the throat of his heroine with never a qualm; Dreiser gets inside the skins of his characters, cries with Sister Carrie, flutters with Jennie Gerhardt, struts with Frank Cowperwood, sneaks away from a killing with Clyde Griffith—*An American Tragedy* is Dreiser's tragedy.

They are unlike in their abilities to catch and reproduce the atmosphere of places and in the creation of characters who fit into those places. Here Cabell, who has the wider range of knowledge, shows to advantage, while Dreiser's limitations are painfully revealed. This is most strikingly shown in their handlings of metropolitan scenes and life. In the portrayals of ordinary types and small places Dreiser is authentic. He knows exactly what to do with the village, with the barber, with the plumber, with the barroom, with the village belles and village beaus. But when he ventures into Philadelphia or New York and endeavors to recreate the talk of captains of

industry or social leaders he is as flat as a flounder.

Cabell, though, in any smart-set world can ruffle it with the best of them. He knows precisely the proper weight and weave of the damask table cover, how silver should be crested, how pictures should be hung, wines ordered, Chopin played. "Yas, sir," as his Negro servitors would say, "Mr. Cabell, he's very knowledgous."

They are unlike in that the one is a blown-in-the-bottle realist, the other an incurable romanticist. Dreiser's intent is clear enough. He's going to tell about life as it is, about all of life and in particular about that part of life that his contemporaries have left out. He'll paint it in its nobilities if he can descry any, but, at any rate, he'll paint it in its meannesses.

Cabell is a declared romanticist. He will paint things, not as they are, but as he would like them to be. He will select whatever beauties are in the world and so magnify them and so charmingly set them forth in words that run like water that his readers shall forget the sordid actualities that weight their spirits down.

Paint life as it is? Cabell says: "No one on the preferable side of Bedlam wishes to be reminded of what we are in actuality." And so he says of places about which he writes—"these places have no existence save in my fancy," are

but "portions of my dreams, for the country in which I actually am I find an inadequate place in which to live."

However can these agree? What possible kinship can there be? With all these dissimilarities pointed out—and they by no means exhaust the list—how are you going to get these two in the same house, much less in the same bed and under one blanket?

It is not a difficult matter. Not an unlikeness I have accentuated but is on the surface. Faces may differ, and hands and voices and environments, artist-procedures and performances, yet beneath all these dissimilarities there may be the call of brain to brain and blood to blood. Two battleships may have superficial dissimilarities. The one may be named "His Majesty," the other "The Thunderer." One may be painted in white, the other in black; the decks of the one may be clean-sanded, the decks of the other afoul with grease and slime; and yet they may have exactly the same displacement, may be similarly engined and in both alike death be sleeping in the guns.

But where is there similarity, where identity?

To begin, the books of both have run the cordon of publishers who knew not whether to give their creators the accolade or the bastinado. Dreiser's first book went to Harper's and was turned down because of its pornography; it was accepted at

last by Doubleday, Page but edited before it was published. Cabell's books were also sniffed at by the publishers and his *Jurgen*, just as *The Genius* by Dreiser, was banned by the censor. And here is the queer thing about it: these very sniffings and deletions and censorships brought both Cabell and Dreiser into a popularity which, otherwise, certainly would at least have been delayed. Humanity being as it is, the surest way to spread a book is to suppress it. Let the publishers turn down a book because of its real or alleged immorality, it will find through some subterranean channel an outlet, and then if all the preachers pounce on it, the reviewers rip it up, and The Boston Athenaeum lock its doors against it, the book is made. We Americans are certainly queer. Boot a play and hustle off all the actors to the hoosegow and that play, even in a one-horse town, is good for a week's run. Some books, as men, are born to greatness, some achieve it, and some are kicked upstairs. The *Jurgen* of Cabell and *The Genius* of Dreiser might, conceivably, have crawled up the stairway on their own, but creeping on knees is slow business as compared with the velocity of a thing sent on its way by the toe of a boot. The repressors have never understood the stories of Pandora and Bluebeard's Wife. Nothing can convince the censors that the public is just as certain to pry

and peek into forbidden places as these two very amiable ladies were. They do not see that the way of notoriety cast up by prohibition is the short cut to a contemporary fame.

But to return to our twins, they are akin in that both are obsessed by the titillating problems of sex. To one familiar with the tonnage of the sex literature of today this quotation from Bliss Perry's *Study of Prose Fiction* published thirty years ago is strange reading. "People," says Mr. Perry, "who want the sex novel and want it prepared with any literary skill have to import it from across the water." That was just before the Ben Hechts and Scott Fitzgeralds, the Anita Looses, the Amelie Riveses, the Sherwood Andersons and above all, the Theodore Dreisers and James Branch Cabells rose up to obviate that cruel necessity. We have no longer need to import "from across the water"; goods of American manufacture swamp the market. These gentlemen, and ladies too, of the physiological school of fiction have vastly enlarged the number of consumers of their wares, but, even so, the production outruns the consumptive demand. Of this brand of manufacturers Dreiser and Cabell have been by far the most conspicuous. For two decades they have well nigh constituted a trust in animal explosives.

There was nothing accidental in this new emphasis. Until now, Dreiser declared, the novelists have told some things about life, *but not all.* Dreiser will tell all. What Dreiser said of himself may be said of his books—they "blaze with sex." So of Cabell. "His philosophic credo," says one of his commentators, "insofar as he appears to have one, seems to be the eternal repetition of life, the only object of which is procreation." Cabell sold himself to the fleshpots of Egypt and if he brought us Egypt's savory stews, he also brought Egypt's flies.

Hear him in *Jurgen*: "There is not any memory with less satisfaction in it than the memory of some temptation we resisted." And again, "Lord, how one's women do add up." Another, "Love alone can lend young people rapture, however transiently, in a world wherein the result of every human endeavor is transient and the end of all is death." In summary, "To pretend then what my body does or endures seems rather silly nowadays."

Not that Dreiser and Cabell are alike in their treatments of this delicate theme. They are miles apart. In Dreiser's pages sex is revealed in the terms of a retching realism, in Cabell's in the flowing periods of a scented romanticism. But however methods may differ their disclosures are

blood kin, and arm in arm they go faring along the way of dust.

Let me be understood. There can be no reasonable objection to the discussion of sex problems. They are among the gravest and most perplexing problems life is called upon to face. Here are great driving forces that are to be reckoned with. Victorian prudery, in its maskings, is as silly as it is ineffectual, and deceives nobody. Our objection to Dreiser and Cabell is not that they hitch physical forces and urges to the car of humanity, but that they hook them up without either reins for the steed or brakes for the car and that, invariably, they have a runaway.

And above all, as artists, they commit suicide in their obsessions with these sex problems, and in their failures to see anything but physical urges in the unfoldings of the dramas of human life. We go with them when they assert that man is *part* animal; we bid them good-bye when they declare that man is *all* animal. We agree with them in that we live close by the jungle and that at times its hot breath touches every forehead; we deny that we *live* in the jungle, *toil* in the jungle and that in the jungle we *die*.

Dreiser and Cabell are at one not only in their obsession by the sex problem but in the way of its solution. That solution, boldly, is the removal of all restraint. Marriage, of course, they hold

is an archaic institution, existent now only in form, and soon to be wholly obsolescent. In its place we are to have—what? Unions of one man and one woman, or synchronous multiple unions founded on love? Why so old fashioned as that? Love? Love as the twins see it at the altar or under the rose, is a cheat. It is a high-sounding name for a low-crawling animalism. Now we might look for this sort of thing from Dreiser, but that Cabell—Cabell who began his career of authorship with the intention to "write only about beautiful things in a beautiful way"—should hold romantic love as pure illusion and find only below the diaphragm the springs of all human actions, brings nothing short of shock. Fastidiousness then, or selectiveness in satisfactions of purely animal cravings, is plain buncombe.

Dreiser and Cabell are alike in their philosophy of the universe as a whole, and of that little part we call human life. It is a material universe. Dreiser conceives it as a sort of giant organism made up of an infinite number of cells, of which cells Dreiser is one, you another. There is no difference between the cell you call a cabbage and the cell you call a man. Cells are born, cells grow, cells die, but the organism as a whole is unchanging either in its bulk or its insentence. It knows not that there is birth or there is death.

Sometimes Dreiser conceives it as *slumberingly* sentient, moving or drifting here or there, but never does he give it consciousness of direction or clear intent. It has no eyes, no brain, no heart, no will.

Cabell at times may have the glimmering notion that the winds blow purposefully, but in a moment he has clambered back into his Ivory Tower and the downward drifting winds bear only the thin laughter of the mocker. There's no angry, hurt protest, as from Dreiser, just the edged irony of the bored and blasé man who had looked out upon the universe and found it not much of a show. Dreiser fronts the tragedies of things with a curse, but Cabell stifles a yawn.

Bottomless is Dreiser's despair. Listen to some of his indictments:

> The damnable scheme of things which we call existence brings about conditions whereby whole masses suffer who have no cause to suffer, and, on the other hand, whole masses joy who have no cause to joy. It rains on the just and the unjust impartially. We suffer for our temperaments, which we did not make, and for our weaknesses, or lacks, which are no part of our willing or doing.

There was a time in his life, he writes, when he thought it was worth while to get somewhere, but now, he says he considers his striving as of no importance. Nothing is of any importance.

He is certain about nothing. He writes about truth and beauty and hope and love, but confesses, "I do not know what truth is, what beauty is, what love is, what hope is."

But his ignorance too is nothing. This pessimism harks back to a distinct point in time. He writes,

> About this time, I read the *Data of Ethics* and *First Principles* of Herbert Spencer. They nearly killed me, took every shred of belief away from me; showed me that I was a chemical atom in a whirl of unknown forces; the realization clouded my mind. I felt the rhythm of life, but the central fact to me was that the whole thing was unknowable—uncomprehensible. I went down into the depths and I am not sure that I have ever gotten out of them.

Dreiser, through Spencer's eyes, sees men as mere chemical atoms in the grip of cosmic forces; Cabell sees men as "wingless bipeds . . . left to their own devices among much noncommittal stardrift."

"Atoms in a ferment," according to Dreiser, or "human bipeds midst noncommittal stardrift," according to Cabell—take your choice. Both the atom and the biped are powerless to resist the implacable forces that control their destinies. Struggle is useless. Dreiser writing of a certain story says, "It is the story of 'Waste' "; Cabell says, "If ever I were to attempt a tale of Litch-

field I would not write a romance, but a tragedy. I think I would call my tragedy 'Futility.' " There you have it again, "Waste" or "Futility."

"Futility," cries Cabell, and that sombre thread runs through his two dozen or more gaily patterned romances. As their rich tapestries weave to and fro in the moonlight of his fantasies, more stabbing than the glitter of their gold is the blackness of their black.

Take a peek into his fifteen books which he calls the biography of Manuel. The scenes are all laid in a medieval country of his creation. He calls it "Poictesme." It is "bounded by Avalon and Phaèacia and seacoast Bohemia and the contiguous forests of Arden and Broceliande and on the west of course by the Hesperides." In this imaginary country his characters come and go, though he gives them license to wander as far as England, Portugal, Olympus, Jerusalem. These characters are all the descendants of Manuel, Count of Poictesme, and stretch from this mythical count to the Virginians of today. So gorgeously outfitted in pedigree, and living in this romantic Poictesme, you expect a great deal of them, but are doomed to disappointment. Through thousands of pages they ride and jest and joust and drink and swear and fight, but despite all their romantic settings and trappings these gaily bedighted knights are but plug-uglies in disguise

and for all their furious gallopings they never arrive. They are seekers of pleasure, lovers of beauty, but the pleasures they seek are passion-scented and the beauties are the beauties of pink flesh.

Poictesme is a pleasant country with lordly castles and noble landscapes, through which wind long processions of gallant courtiers and enchanting women, while the brasses blow and the strings breathe—a lovely land. But Poictesme is "East of Suez" and there "there ain't no ten commandments." No descendants of Count Manuel were ever awed by sight of Sinai and the only injunction of the Deity they seem ever to have heard, the injunction, "to multiply and replenish the earth." That with a right good will they do. And so far as Cabell tells the story that is about all they do.

The hero of *Jurgen* may stand for the lot. This precious knave receives a permit from the Devil to wander where he will for a day and do whatever he would like to do. Where he went and what he did may be set down in a book, if censor takes himself not too importantly, but it can't be told in a lecture. But here is no Faust to whom at the end comes the disillusionment of satiety. Not a bit of it. The rogue smacks his lips over the memory of the departed feast and his only regret is that the day was not longer

and his capacity greater. Some kindly reviewer of Cabell has said that there were two Cabells each at war with the other; that one finds in him "the wail of the violins of Venusberg in combat with the long surge of the trombones of the Pilgrim's Chorus." I lay no claim to fineness of audition. But in Cabell's books I've heard the wails of the violins of Venusberg, but if in them there is any surge of the trombones of the Pilgrim's Chorus then Mencken is a Presbyterian parson and black babies come down with the snow. But, however it be, violin-wail and trombone-surge are alike swallowed up in a vast futility.

With Dreiser as conductor you come out at this same grassless place, but you've had a far less intriguing journey. Warsaw, Indiana, is a long way from Poictesme. Warsaw is a long way from Avalon,

> Where falls not hail nor snow
> And where never wind blows loudly;

from forests of Arden, where lovers wander beneath whispering trees and plight eternal troth under a white moon.

Dreiser's world is not a romantic world. It isn't even a real world. As a realist he lays claim to strict veracity of portrayal. He gives us a world of trees and birds and flowers and seas and men, but his flowers never bloom and his birds

never sing. He strips the trees, silences the seas, makes man ridiculous. He gives us a world where Love promises but never fulfills; where Hope beckons but never embraces; where suns set but never rise—an eternity of dusty dusks. It is a world without the dignities of the classic tragedies, wherein great souls are broken on the tragic wheel of Fate, to the accompaniment of the ironic laughter of the gods. In Dreiser's world there is little of the heroic, much of the petty, little that is colorful, much that is drab; and petty minds and petty lives come to undramatic ends through the sting of a bee or the withering of the east wind.

It is all in accordance with the Dreiser formula. Sister Carrie, Jennie, and practically all of Dreiser's heroines are carried through successive seductions and multiple promiscuities not with hurt, as the orthodox would see it, but with many unfetterings. Says Brother Mencken:

> The gain of each is greater than her loss. . . . With the rise from want to security, from fear to ease, comes an awakening of the finer perceptions, a widening of the sympathies, a gradual unfolding of the delicate flower called personality, an increased capacity for loving and living. But with all this, and as a part of it, comes an increased capacity for suffering. . . . The tragedy of Carrie and Jennie, in brief is not that

they are degraded but that they are lifted up; not that they go to the gutter, but that they escape the gutter and glimpse the stars.

Of all Dreiser's men, the same critic affirms, Cowperwood is the most "radiantly real." Mencken sees in him the strong man, the very Sampson of fiction. Other critical authorities divide on whether he should be labelled a "guttersnipe" or a "tomcat." Cowperwood is as outstanding in his gallantries as in his financial enterprises in which his power of a wrecker as well as a builder is fully set forth. And in both he is equally successful. But a fearsome retribution awaits him, he goes out of the book's end with a new love.

But this must be said of all of Dreiser's characters: laws unto themselves, and going wherever feet are drawn to go, none of them seem to have gotten much satisfaction out of life. Dreiser as he says again and again of himself accepts none of the accredited moralities, the moralities prescribed either by custom or religion, and yet in the smother of his higgledy-piggledies he finds no joy. Dreiser's is not the smile that never comes off, but the smile that never comes on. And so of Dreiser's men and women. If it isn't a scurvy it's at least a sad lot.

Futility. Waste. Such is life as Cabell and Dreiser see it. It is not just a blunder, it's worse, it's a bore.

So Dreiser and Cabell are twins in their rebellions against the universe that has been so botched in its making. But what do they propose to do about it? What are their blueprints of a better world? They have none. And this is their condemnation. To rebel is not enough. It's easy to kick over the milk bucket, but on what milk are the children to live? These iconoclasts have right to criticize our present political and economic orders—they give ground for criticism. They have right to condemn our present social order and institutions—they are far from perfect. They have right to gird at conventional moralities—this is a free country and every man may speak his piece. They have right to declare that morality, however conceived, is but an *ignis fatuus* of a diseased brain, seeing that we are wholly physical and dreams are dust. They have right to declare religion a fake and a nuisance—no tongues nowadays are clipped for blasphemy. I say they have *right* to it, the right of liberty that God grants to every man of making what he will of himself, if it be only a fool.

But they have no right of reason to attempt the destruction of any order or any system or any institution unless they have a better order or sys-

tem or institution to put in its place. Men seeking to reform should be given leeway; men seeking only to destroy should be given the rope. Humanity in the world today is poorly housed, God knows, but no man has right to set fire to the building that gives shelter to man's standards, his faiths, his hopes, the records of his escapes from the jungle and his age-long struggles, until first he have, at least in vision, a nobler house in which men may more freely breathe. Men who think twice will be slow to scrap the solid something that is, with all its faults, for the something that isn't, though the praise of that non-existent thing be chanted by Cabell of Litchfield or Dreiser of Warsaw.

Now lest these strictures be interpreted as a sort of pulpit censoring and create readers for books I do not greatly admire, let me add this: To me, most of the books of Dreiser and Cabell are dreary and deadly dull. Cabell has wit and fluency and grace. One may feel like swallowing his potion for the sake of the loveliness of the cup which he places to our lips, but Dreiser serves bilge water in a cup both ugly and dirty, and a sewer is a sewer and a stench is a stench, whether is be borne to us on the creaking cart of Dreiser's turgid flood of words or in the soft-purring Rolls-Royce of Cabell's ornate prose.

If ever there were examples of genius come to tragic blossomings you have them in Theodore Dreiser and James Branch Cabell. Anatole France somewhere says—I think in his article on Paul Bourget in *Life and Letters*—this about art: "The mission of Art is to give purpose and zest to life." Purpose and zest. Do we find it in Dreiser and Cabell?

I've waded through their two dozen and more books and I've seen much, heard much, in these many thousand pages.

I've seen youth passing into a blear-eyed, cynic-hearted manhood. I've seen the swift, sure dissolutions of womanhood. I've seen doddering age limping toward dark graves. I've seen the myriad leaves of the forest yellowing to their fall. I've seen the day dying, its couch in the west awash with blood. I've seen one by one the stars go out in the sky. I've heard much. I've heard the snickers of the salacious. I've heard the yawns of sophisticates. I've heard the moaning at the bar and the sea's deep diapasons of despair. I've heard the whine of the east winds and the screaming of the tornado as it toppled over the tall monuments of men's pride. I've heard the death rattle in the throat of Faith. I've heard the fall of the clod on our coffined illusions. Yet nowhere in all that multi-faced, multi-voiced

world have I found that which gives edge to purpose and zest to life.

Lacking this, for all of Dreiser's strength and Cabell's skill, these Titans who might have wrought enduringly in marble or in bronze, will, departing, leave behind them only perishable trifles of papier-maché to be quickly covered up by the drifting sands.

H. G. WELLS—THE NEW DELIVERER

It is a very difficult matter to talk informingly about H. G. Wells, not because there is so little to say, but because there is so much. It is like having Mont Blanc for breakfast, Pikes Peak for luncheon, and for dinner all the Andean and Himalayan ranges.

If this seems absurd it is after the Wells manner. In Mr. Wells' exuberant rhetoric candle-flickers are always sunbursts, hillocks are mountains, and mice are men. He seeks to attract attention through exaggeration, and tells a whopper with the certitude of conviction that the taller the tale the more surely it will be swallowed.

Yet in all his riotous extravaganzas Wells himself is as solemn faced as an undertaker. Here he is the exact antithesis of his playmate, George Bernard Shaw. The Irish Shaw says that the only way he can get a serious thought across is to put on his cap and bells and carry conviction through his clowning. Wells, per contra, puts on his philosopher's gown before he even cracks a jest. This is no pose. Wells is deadly serious. He has the sense of mission. He is the Moses of the new deliverance, and while Shaw, who also thinks himself a Moses, is capering in the circus, Wells is coming down the slopes of Sinai bearing the new tablets in his hands. Wells takes

himself seriously. He does not envisage himself a wit or an essayist or even a historian, but as a prophet and a deliverer. I would add, "reformer," but for this: a reformer is one who straightens out the things that have gone wrong, who restores the vision that was lost. Mr. Wells is so thoroughgoing in his distrust of all that is and all that ever was that he holds that the best things to do with existing philosophical systems and moral standards and religious credos and institutions is to make a bonfire of them all and begin anew. There's no wisdom in tinkering with outmoded things; put a match to them and enjoy the blaze. There's nothing in the present order worth salvaging.

There is just this trouble though about the Wells blueprints of the new world: they won't stay put. Before you ever get them in mind Mr. Wells has had a new vision and the blueprints are being endlessly revised. Mr. Wells makes the world over at every moon's quartering. This present-day Moses is, decidedly, no standpatter and every time the wind changes he hikes up the Mount again to bring down the latest editions of Sinai. The man has a restless mind.

Acknowledged leader of the pack, this Hound of Heaven is tortured by the vision of that other Hound of Heaven, whose flying feet have brought him yet nearer his quarry, and so Mr. Wells is

always trying to overtake his own bark. And it can't be done.

But one thing, at least, you can say of this swift pursuer: as no other four-footed thing it freights with its bayings, the winds of all the earth. He lives in a tent and strikes canvas every morning. He pokes into everything, probes everything, writes about anything. With apologies,

> Each morning sees some book begun.
> Each evening sees it done.

Books about science. Books about philosophy. Books about the long tomorrow. Tracts, essays, histories, poems, novels fall from his pen as leaves flutter from forest trees and with never a hint of possible exhaustion.

And all with an end. Wells is primarily neither historian, nor philosopher, nor fictionist. He is a propagandist. And a propagandist to be reckoned with because he believes mightily in himself. He is no futilitarian. It is this delicious self-assurance that makes Wells a perpetual delight. We can laugh with him and we can laugh at him. The laughter is all the more crackling when he assumes his pontifical robes. When he essays the rôle of the humorist he sometimes starts a grin and sometimes a yawn, but when he puts on his warrior's mail and goes out to slay all the old truths, which to him are the old

superstitions, and when, the battle over, having got the victory—Wells always gets the victory in the story by H. G. Wells—he proudly demands who killed Cock Robin and bids us to take a "last look at the deceased" he is wholly irresistible.

Herbert George Wells was born in 1866. His birth was as undistinguished as his career has been brilliant. His father was a small shopkeeper, his mother was the housekeeper in a country house where Wells spent several of his boyhood years. He started out for himself as a clerk, then as teacher in a grammar school. He got a scholarship in a scientific school, made a brilliant record in his biology classes, turned lecturer and journalist, and in a variety of ways fitted himself for the tasks of authorship to which he settled down in his late twenties. To be exact in 1893. From that time until now, Mr. Wells has been one of the most prolific and one of the most interesting writers in the English tongue, or, as for the matter, in any tongue. Few of his books, if any, have ever come to such wide reading as Sinclair Lewis' *Main Street* or Kipling's *Kim,* but, if I mistake not, at least two of them, *Tono Bungay* and *Mr. Britling Sees It Through*—possibly others—have been best sellers, and nearly all of them have attained a very considerable circulation. All in all, millions and millions of copies of his various works have been sold and

to Mr. Herbert George Wells the vocation of literature has proved as lucrative as fascinating. Not all of his books have been inspired, but he has always struck pay dirt. If not in the books themselves, in the book stalls.

Copious as has been his invention and facile his pen, he could never have turned out so many books if he had restricted himself to any single line of thought or been shut up to any single hobby. But no thought of such limitation ever occurred to Wells. In the words of one of his own pronouncements, "We novelists are going to write about the whole of human life: we are going to deal with political questions and religious questions and social questions."

In many of his books Wells even transcends his declared thought-ranges and goes tripping out into the world of fantasy where there is no human life at all. He shows us an orchid reaching out its tentacles and sucking the blood of its owner. In a shop window he finds a glass egg, which turns out to be a lens, through which the inhabitants of Mars look at our little earth. In *The Island of Doctor Moreau* he gives us an account of a scientist, who trying to speed up evolution, is doing things to the lower animals, cutting them up here and there in an endeavor to turn them into men. He tells us of a chemist who, blown up by an explosion in his laboratory,

is somewhere mysteriously reassembled, comes back to the earth in reverse, as it were, his face looking backward, his right hand his left and his left hand his right. In *The War of the Worlds*—I can recall how the reading of the pesky thing, shortly after its publication, kept me awake at nights—he describes an attack on the earth by superhuman creatures, shot from Mars in steel bombs. These are only a few of his many excursions into the fanciful, but enough to show that if Wells' feet never touched the world of reality at all he could write no end about super- and sub-terrestrial things and find for his audience both youth and age. He can beat Jules Verne, Daniel Defoe, and that monumental liar, Marco Polo, on their own ground and have as many visions over a cup of mild tea as DeQuincey over his opium pipe or Poe over his bottle of gin.

But in the main Wells puts lead in his shoes and keeps down to earth. And as he goes trudging about, poking into this, peering into that, it is with the conscious air of the editor of a little county-seat newspaper which I read in my boyhood who every week flaunted this quotation from his masthead, "A chiel's among you taking notes and faith he'll print 'em." Wells is the indefatigable reporter and everything he sees he'll print.

But do the man full justice. He sees things, prints things, but never with ultimate regard for the photograph. He tells of things as they are, but never with the view of leaving them as they are. He wants to do something about it all. He wants not so much to paint as to change. "It bores me to look at things," he says, "unless there is also the idea of doing something with them. . . . In the books I have written it is always about life being altered, I write on about people developing schemes for altering life. . . . My apparently most objectless books are criticisms and incitements to change."

What does he wish to change? Apparently everything. Life to his eyes is but "a tremendous spawning and proliferation of uneventful humanity."

Sometimes he conceives the universe in the guise of an utter objective impassivity, as does Miss Austin, who recalling a night beneath western skies tells how the stars shone down in equal brilliancy upon her, the watcher, and a lone coyote of the desert; yet taking no thought either of the coyote or her. Sometimes in the terms of the ironic, as Edward Vaughn Moody, who sees himself only as a ridiculous little thing:

> I, last product of the toiling ages,
> Goal of heroic feet that never lagged—
> A little man in trousers, slightly jagged!

Sometimes as a mischievous entity, contriving to put our best intentions and contrivances askew, as O. Henry, who, in one of his tales, tells of a husband and wife who were anxious to give each other a Christmas present—the wife sells her hair, which is her greatest asset, to buy a chain for her husband's watch; the husband sells his watch, which is his proudest possession, to buy a set of combs for his wife's hair. Sometimes as the author of loss and sorrow, as Alice Meynell:

> Nothing begins and nothing ends,
> That is not paid with moan;
> For we are born in other's pain
> And perish in our own.

But whether the universe be wholly impassive or whimsically mischievous or terribly tragic, Mr. Wells proposes to do something about it. He's going to change it. Things are not to remain as they are. He's going to blast the universe out of its indifference. He'll bully it out of its bad-boy tricks. He'll cut the claws of its cruelty.

Mr. Wells has written so many books that in a single review there is hardly time even to mention their titles. It is some compensation to know that many of them are hardly worth mentioning.

If I were arranging these works in my own library I'd put them, in the rough, under these labels—short stories, works of the imagination,

such as *The War of the Worlds, The First Men in the Moon, In the Days of the Comet;* politics, as *The New Machiavelli;* marriage, such as *Marriage, Love and Mr. Wickersham;* character studies, such as *Kipps, The Wife of Sir Isaac Harmon;* religion, such as *The Undying Fire, The Invisible King.* And then, under another head, books to be read, I'd put *Tono Bungay, The Outline of History, Mr. Britling Sees It Through.* First of all I would take down Wells' *Outline of History.* There are many other "short," "abridged" histories, but none other like Wells'. It is not just a string of names, the chronicle of dynasties, the story of battles. It is a tale about how life began, how life has gone on, the life of man. It is a description of how man emerged, and how slowly he did emerge, from his animalism. It tells what food he ate, what kind of houses he lived in. It sets forth his games and his work.

It has to do not so much with the great names of history, the Alexanders, the Caesars, the Napoleons, but with the great movements of history. It is concerned not so much with battle axes and suits of mail as with ploughs and irrigation and printing presses and cotton and woolen mills. It doesn't give a hoot about the names of the Pharaohs, but it tells you about how the Irish came to eat potatoes and the Englishman to drink

tea. Wells, the historian, sees nothing worth the telling in the pedigrees of the Hapsburgs and the Hohenzollerns and holds the family tree of the Hanovers of less account than a pawpaw or a scrub oak. But he'll sit for hours beneath a mulberry tree, watching the silkworms in their manufacture of leaves and juices into the stuff of silk. In brief it deals with the vital things of history and not with loveless skeletons.

Among the vital things are the religions of the world, and although Wells' treatment of the Christian religion is far from sympathetic and is disproportionate in its emphases, yet bearing in mind the author's anti-Christian bent there is much in the story that provokes thought, even if there be little to confirm faith.

How much of all this mountainous material Mr. Wells dug up with his own spade we can only conjecture, but whoever its excavators the assembling of all these heterogeneities into a symmetrical whole is undoubtedly by the hands of H. G. Wells and it is his hardness and clarity of style that flashes out from all these many hundreds of pages. It is not a book to be skimmed through, but to be patiently studied.

Tono Bungay is also richly rewarding, though in a wholly different vein. It's the tale of a mountebank, who gets rich on the sale of Tono Bungay, the name of a worthless patent medicine.

Its characterizations are superb. The portraits of Beatrice, Miriam, Ponderovo, the charlatan who foists Tono Bungay on the gullibles, are life-sized and life-limned. In this, as in nearly all of Wells' novels, there are confusions, misdirected energies, futile strivings, blanks. The patent medicine vendor gives us the key to the story when speaking of the *name* he gave the worthless medicine. "I have called it Tono Bungay, but I had far better call it 'Waste.'" Yes, it's all waste. The medicine is waste. Miriam is waste. Beatrice is waste. Ponderovo is waste. All plannings, all performances, all dreams, all deeds, waste. "Life is a thing that hurts, my dear." Life hurts and not Tono Bungay nor all the wit or wisdom of man can heal that hurt.

I can recall my first reading of *Mr. Britling Sees It Through.* It was in war days, war days in which it was written and in which it was read. The book differed from all of Mr. Wells' preceding books. It was less frosty, less detached. It seemed to have come not out of its author's head, but his heart. It was warmed by sympathies, suffused with a great tenderness. Through all its pages there sounded the note of wistfulness, of longing. Bottomless despair was in it, but also the faint tremor of hope. It was the reaction of a cultivated, sensitive Englishman, who had a soldier son at the front, to the piercing drama

of the World War. At times Mr. Britling seems to be mellowed to the very point of Christian humility, as when, standing on the spot that had witnessed a Zeppelin raid there was borne in upon his memory the prayer of Jesus for those who had nailed him to the cross. He whispered the words. No unfamiliar words could have had the same effect of comfort and conviction.

He whispered it of those men whom he still imagined flying far away there eastward, through the clear freezing air beneath the stars. Those German sailors and engineers who had caused so much pain and agony in this little town:

Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.

Yes, Mr. Britling is in a melting mood, but if you think that Mr. Britling, who is Wells in faint disguise, is about to be converted, has been "convicted," has "seen the light," and is pressing forward to the mourners' bench, you have another guess coming. Wells has the vision of a better order, a better world, but it is no Jerusalem coming down from the skies, it is a brand new model, the plans and specifications obligingly drawn by that quite sufficient architect of the tomorrows—H. G. Wells.

What are these plans and specifications? Here we are getting at the rib of things. Mr. Wells is

not so much distinguished by his books as by his views. What then are his views, opinions, beliefs?

And here at the very outset we come to a strange thing—Mr. Wells says, "I make my beliefs as I want them, I do not go to the past for them. I make them thus, and not thus, exactly as an artist makes a picture so, and not so." This is an amazing utterance. None of Mr. Wells' beliefs, according to Mr. Wells, grow out of the ground of reality. He pulls them out of the air. This, even Mr. Wells should see, is skating on thin ice. If he can make his beliefs about man, life, duty, God just as an artist "makes a picture so, or not so," obviously he can thus make his beliefs about the physical universe. He can make himself believe that two apples and two apples are five apples or seven or—the sky the limit—a million. If he is not to make his beliefs after the pattern of fact he can believe that water runs uphill and that kittens were cats before they were kittens. With the same facility of accommodating himself to artist whims rather than fact compulsions, he can believe that he sings with his ears, or hears with his nose, walks with his hands, and writes with his toes.

The further difficulty in following Mr. Wells is this: even those beliefs he has so fantastically arrived at will not stay hitched. Queer as is their gestation we might come to some under-

standing of them if they would only stay put. But they won't. Mr. Wells' beliefs not only differ from the beliefs of others, but more than that Mr. Wells is always differing from Mr. Wells. He makes, as he says, his beliefs as he wants them, and what he wants today he will disown tomorrow.

Yet he does claim consistency in his allegiance to certain great beliefs.

For one he believes that Utopia is on the way. We are a long distance from it now. The world as Mr. Wells sees it is physical, with only slight suffusions, if at all, of a kind of sublimated cosmic consciousness whose pulse beat is in the ether. Things are determined here by blind forces whose reactions upon matter and one another constitute the riddle we call life. Thus far, without the control of any superior intelligence these forces have made only a pretty mess of things. Yet the outlook is not altogether dark. Mr. Wells proposes to bridle those blind forces and, after the pattern given him on the Mount, to have them henceforth move, if not purposefully, yet straightly to the goal he has described.

What will Utopia be like when we get there?

For one thing it will be the land of the socialists.

Mr. Wells, like all of England's intellectuals save Kipling—if indeed the author of the "Reces-

sional" has right to a hat-peg in the club of the Intelligentsia—is a socialist. He's not an orthodox socialist—how could he be? How could he be orthodox in anything? He does not know the Marxian mould, or the Lenin mould or even the elastic mould of Henry George or Ramsay MacDonald. He's just one of the thirty-seven varieties of socialism, himself, and none others included, a *particular* variety. He will not march with the Reds. He will not march with Snowden. He will march with himself.

Utopia is far from convincing. It has the smell of the kitchen and the deadly monotony of the barracks. A protest against materialism, it is yet a place where the ultimate achievement is sanitary tenements and the acme of felicity is short working hours, communal music, and a full stomach.

Education in Mr. Wells' program is not only an *end,* but a *way.* Wells differs from the orthodox socialists in this: he refuses to accept the Marxian dogma that class war is inevitable and that socialism will come as the sequence of that war. He believes in the socialism of evolution and not the socialism of revolution. But evolution moves slowly and, in this particular thing, it moves through education. Mr. Wells does not believe that either Britain or any other country is yet ready for socialism. It can be made ready

only by the educator. Salvation is through the schools. Deliverance waits upon the university.

Education then, but education after the Wells pattern. And what is that? Omitting all prefaces and all philosophies it is a "practical" education. Little Greek and less Latin, stiff doses of mathematics, English literature and, above all, science. Wells is himself quite a respectable biologist and as he sees it the way out of present racial and individual weaknesses and maladjustments is the biological way. In plain words, he holds that the only way to improve the human stock is scientific breeding. But here two difficulties confront us. The eugenists can't agree on what kind of an animal they should try to turn out and, if they did, they do not know what matings will work to that end. So Wells advises wide "experimentations," which, no doubt, without his promptings, endlessly will be.

Education, though, broadly diffused, however empirical, is one of the landmarks of Utopia. Yet in Wells the New-Republic culture comes to bloom in a superior class and the republic is governed not by a democracy but by an aristocracy of brain and worth. I have never been able to make this Wells republic fit into his socialistic pattern. Socialism, as I understand it, always connotes universality of privileges and power, and yet here is this Utopia, in a social-

istic world, ruled by the elect few. But there's no need to try to make the two programs square with each other. Just bear in mind that Wells does not draw his beliefs from facts but, as an artist makes them, so and not so.

In this Utopia we get a glimpse of the new woman. No present-day writer, save perhaps Shaw, has so concerned himself with the problem of sex or written so many words about it as Mr. Wells. His approach is that of the scientist. The problem, to him, is a strictly biological problem. There are no reticences in these discussions. The newness of Mr. Wells' new woman is not so much in her claim to equality with men in political and property rights—this is a commonplace—but in her new attitudes toward marriage and maternity. Mr. Wells has no outright opposition to the institution of marriage. He would not abolish it. He would make divorces much easier but he would not utterly do away with this ancient institution. As a whole he is inclined to the opinion that it has its good points. On the surface he inclines to monogamy, but a monogamy to be interpreted by new rules. But marriage must not be the only road to maternity. Millions of women, Mr. Wells holds, wish for maternity, but without the intolerableness of conjugal yokes, and to these must be given the liberties they love without stain or shadow of social disapproval.

After all, says Mr. Wells, nature—and nature is all—is concerned solely with the perpetuation of the species and any social arrangements, whatever they may be, that bring beautiful and healthy children into the world meet nature's stern demand.

Moralities? The only moralities are biological, all others dust of dreams.

What about Utopia's religion? In this realm Wells is as anarchistic as elsewhere. He says of himself, "I suppose I am a deeply religious man, as men of my quality go." Certainly, Mr. Wells' religion is not the religion of any of the churches of Christendom of which Mr. Wells writes. "But when one thinks that people are living and dying now, quarreling and sulking, misled and misunderstanding, vaguely fearful, condemning and thwarting one another in the close darkness of these narrow cults—O God, one wants a gale out of heaven, one wants a great gale from the sea."

But you say in that quotation Mr. Wells recognized the Deity, he said, "O God." True. For rhetorical purposes, Mr. Wells would lug in the Ten Commandments, would pad out a sentence with the name "God."

But what does he mean by his "O God"? Well, in addition to all else he has said on the matter, he has written a whole book about God. It is entitled *The Invisible King*. The echoes of my

first reading of this book, as of *Mr. Britling Sees It Through,* are still in my memory. I recall how about the time of its publication Mr. Wells was supposed to have seen the vision on his Damascus way and that Saul was now numbered among the prophets. It was trumpeted in the press that, at last, Mr. Wells had "discovered" God.

The reading of the book bore out the truth of the trumpeting that Mr. Wells had discovered God. He had. And it was an original discovery. It was the discovery of such a God as had never been revealed before to eyes of man. For once the reviewers had understated the case. "Discovery" was too weak a word. Mr. Wells had created God and had fashioned him in his own image. The God of Mr. Wells' invention, like Wells, was bounded in his vision, though he did see far, and limited in his power. He was mighty but not *all* mighty. Like Wells he was often baffled in his undertakings, though on the whole he had accomplished a great deal. But his most astonishing likeness to Wells was that, great as he is, there was a time when he was not and a time when he began to be. There is no breath of eternity in his nostrils. There's no from everlasting to everlasting. He is no "Ancient of Days." He is *young.* God isn't from the no-beginning. He came into the universe at a defi-

nite time just as did the hills which are not of his creations and the stars, which he didn't hang in the sky. When did he come? A biologist and not a geologist, Mr. Wells can't give with accuracy the answer, but, astronomically speaking, rather recently. At any rate God is still youthful. Upon this Mr. Wells insists. God is yet in his teens.

But there is this to be said about the Wells deity, he is constantly expanding. Gilbert Chesterton, speaking of Mr. Wells, says that you can lie awake at night and "hear him grow." So of Mr. Wells' God, he's *growing*.

I am not mocking. The God for whose "discovery" or for whose invention, we are indebted to Wells, is constantly pictured in *The Invisible King* as growing in knowledge, in pity, and in power. Therein as Wells sees it is the world's hope. Up until now God hasn't made a very great success in managing this universe into which he was borne. He has been futilely striving against adverse forces which he only dimly comprehended and whose might has overmatched his own. But all the while he has been learning, has been growing, and now he will pull the universe out of the mud. All this would be sheer blasphemy if it were not so unspeakably ridiculous.

Who and what is "This Invisible King" as our author sees him? An idea, an ideal, the time-spirit, the spirit of humanity, a vapor, a cloud, a dream, a poetical extravaganza, a something, a nothing, a nothing that is both a nothing and a something, a something that is neither a something nor a nothing.

That Mr. Wells has a present vogue cannot be questioned. He is a rebel and this is the rebel's day. But history tells us that rebellions either are put down, or, succeeding, are confronted with the necessities of constructive programs and doff their rebel plumes. But Wells without his plumes would not be Wells. As a bomber of ancient citadels he has shown skill, but the stuff of the builder is not in him. His works disclose neither a creative intelligence, for all his forays in strange worlds, nor the genius of an artist. As a philosopher he plumbs no depths and there's no lark song in his throat. He may be, as it is said of him, the voice of the younger generation, but pretty soon the younger generation will be the older generation and to that young generation that is to be, Wells will be no gallant leader, blowing the bugles of the morning, but a huddle by the fireside, piping in the pathos of his loneliness.

Wells is of journalistic and sociological rather than literary significance. On the seas of the future this freebooter's craft steered by wit and

not by wisdom, long in sails and short in ballast, is doomed to go down. The beribboned bark bearing the lettering, "H. G. Wells," will be numbered among the million vessels "lost at sea."

The tomorrows, in my judgment, will mark Wells not up but down, a spent rocket and not a star.

CARL SANDBURG—THE PRAIRIE POET

Harry Hansen begins his *Midwest Portraits* with these words: "There remains in my mind an unforgettable picture: Carl Sandburg standing before the heavy hangings of red velvet in Mandell Hall at the University of Chicago, twanging his guitar and singing into its Gothic recesses the gutter songs of America. Imagine his surroundings: the hall almost monastic: the audience cloistered almost, and to this spot dedicated to the refinements of literature comes this raucous voiced singer." Carl Sandburg, the son of a Swedish immigrant, Sandburg who began his young manhood life as driver of a milk wagon in Galesburg, Illinois, where he was born, who was farm hand in Kansas, who turned dishwasher in Omaha and Kansas City, who at last came back to his Illinois milk wagon—chum of the roustabouts, twin of the tram, singing in Mandell Hall! I'm wondering if Hansen heard him recite these lines:

> I don't like no railroad fool,
> Railroad fool has a head like a mule.

Or these:

> Since when did you kiss yourself in?
> And who do you think you are?
> Come across, kick in, loosen up,
> Where do you get that chatter?

I wonder if in those classic shades he recited his definition of poetry—"poetry is the achievement of hyacinths and biscuits." And I'm wondering just what the Chicago professors would have thought of this other definition of poetry—"poetry is a sliver of the moon, lost in the belly of the frog."

One of the most significant, certainly one of the most distinguished of our American poets, Sandburg speaks to us in the tempo of our times and there are an increasing number who hold that he has something worth while to say. Whether the eggs in his poetic nest are dinosaur or duck size may be in question. But there can be no question that they are present-time laid, that they are warm, that live thought-chicks, near to hatching, are pecking at their shining shells.

I might have hazarded swan eggs, but that would be at odds with the Sandburg tradition. He will have nothing to do with the classic school, where swans swim in dainty pools and are more bent on displaying their grace than on egg-laying. Sandburg would tell you that a duck's egg is far more important than a wren's or an oriole's, that duck meat makes larger contribution to the dinner table than lark meat, and that the feathers of a singing red-breast never make so large and soft a pillow as the feathers of a quacking duck.

This ornithological introduction is not as pointless as it may seem. It leads up to the plump prose of platitude that in both the material and the form of his poetry, Sandburg has broken away from the old school of versifiers and joined fortunes with the new. Only, I think, in somewhat restricted fields can we acclaim him an originator or a pioneer, but he is certainly in the vanguard of the moderns who would scale Parnassus in a wholly new way, cutting new niches for their footsteps as they upward climb.

Perhaps the best approach to Sandburg is through Walt Whitman, just as the best introduction to the life of a man is the story of his grandparents. Sandburg is Walt Whitman's spiritual grandchild. He is Whitmanesque both in the substance of his verse and in its occasional "barbaric yawpings" as well as in its majestic music. He has the Whitman grasp, his rough and tumble approaches, his mordant humor, his satiric laughter, his scorching indignations, his mother tears. Sandburg's "Chicago" and "The Prairie" derive as directly from Whitman's "Chants Democratic" as the oak from the acorn. Without Whitman, Sandburg would never have been. He has much of the strength of his master and shares equally plentifully in that master's weakness.

Before glimpsing Sandburg as a poet look at him as a biographer. To me, having only a superficial knowledge of Sandburg's verse, his biography of Abraham Lincoln came almost as a shock. Somehow I had never associated this revolutionary and defiant singer with scholarship or the vast patience of the scholar. Yet here in this monumental work speaks the scholar and we can only conjecture the years of studious research that give this biography its note of authority. The critics proclaim this life of Lincoln not only as the best biography of its year, but of its decade and, it may be, of many decades. And of all the fields that seemed hopeless for the gleaner, this seemed most barren. There have been over three thousand biographies of Lincoln or, more accurately, more than three thousand books written about Lincoln and yet here comes a man, prairie bred, schooled in the lumber camp and in the streets, who takes this skeleton story, and so fleshes it by his genius that it seems as if it were only yesterday sky-born. This is a very great feat. The erstwhile rod-rider giving us a biography matching and more than matching the psychologic insight of Ludwig as well as the hard brilliance of Strachey. It is imaginative, yet accurate, skillful in fact-marshallings, yet the spade of the historian ever turns up daisies; a disen-

tombment of dead dates and yet at tomb's mouth the lilies blow and bloom—it's a thing to amaze.

Yet, come to think it over, Sandburg is just the man to give us Abraham Lincoln in all the subtleties of a spirit wearing the mask of plainness. For one thing Lincoln was a great man and it takes a great man to interpret him. Sandburg has a closer intellectual affinity with the rail-splitter than Hay or Herndon or any others of the thousand and one who heretofore have tried to tell us about him.

Not only must Lincoln's biographer have some strain of greatness, but as Lincoln was a poet, a poet, one of the greatest prose poets the world man, only the winged feet of another poet can follow the trails he blazed. That Lincoln was a poet, one of the greatest prose poets the world has ever known, is not in question. Of the technique of poetry, Lincoln knew nothing; of poetry of any school or kind he knew practically nothing; but, for all that, Lincoln's speech at Gettysburg is one of the noblest prose poems of the English tongue. The wideness of Shakespeare and the profundities of Job are in the mountain ranges of Lincoln's singing speech. Sandburg is a poet and he knows Lincoln.

He has kinship, too, with this martyred president in the drabness and the hardness of his early life. The paths of their early years run

parallel through the shadows. A celebrated animal painter, whose name I do not recall, said that to paint a sheep you had first to get beneath the fleece of a sheep, into the sheep's heart and be a sheep yourself. Certainly to paint a man you must enter through the gate of sympathy into an understanding of the man. This understanding came easy to Sandburg. He is writing a story in the ink flowing from the presses of his own suffering. Writing about the briers in another's pathway, the briers he knows because they had pierced his own feet.

If one had time, a very close parallel could be drawn of the similarities of idiosyncrasies and temperamental outcroppings of this great Illinoisan who is dead and this great Illinoisan who is alive. Enough for the present to say that Carl Sandburg has given to us the greatest life story that has yet been written of that simplest yet most complex of American leaders.

If Sandburg had never done anything else but give his Rootabaga stories to the world, fantastic stories for children fittingly to be placed on a shelf alongside *Gulliver's Travels, Alice in Wonderland,* and Kipling's *Jungle Stories,* he would have made for himself, I think, an endearing place in literature.

We don't ordinarily think of Sandburg as preeminently a family man and yet it was his devo-

tion to his three little girls, Janet, Margaret, and Helga, that inspired these stories and to them they are properly dedicated.

One day he dropped in on his publishers and fishing from his pockets a manuscript flung it down on the desk saying, "Here are some stories I told my kids"—the Rootabaga stories. It is a tribute to Sandburg's heart as well as his head, his liking for these stories above even his liking for his poems.

What queer stories! The titles show how bizarre they are: "How Bimbs, the Simp's Thumb, Stuck to His Nose When the Wind Changed," "Gimme the Axe," "Three Boys With Kegs of Molasses as Secret Ambitions." Here among others is a story of two skyscrapers. They fell in love and married. They determined to have a child. But this child must not be tied down to corners as they were; it must be free to move about. In due time the child was born. And what do you think it was? A railroad train—"The Golden Spike Limited."

This gives you a taste of Sandburg's whimsicality and the utter abandon of his invention.

Now for Sandburg as poet. To those accustomed to rhymed beauties and to the delicate tidbits of parlor entertainers, Sandburg's verse will come as a distinct shock. It isn't delicate. It isn't refined. It's sometimes as grotesque as

those grinning things at the entrance of Egyptian temples. Yet that ugliness is as fascinating as beauty itself. At any rate it's life, life in the raw, life in its wild, ungovernable, elemental forms and rushes.

As I have said, his poetry is free verse. It is verse so free that it sheds every rag of classical form, reverts to the primitive tom-toms of the savage, and is a wild wolf howling in the wilderness. His poetry is as edged as the breath of a wind blowing over Arctic snows. It hasn't any softness, it has all the harshness of a snapping turtle. Sandburg's muse opens its mouth only to disclose teeth, irregular as the peaks of the Sierra ranges.

I have spoken of his poems as uncouth things in marble, but the metaphor was ill chosen. A statue has rigidity, but Sandburg's stuff is fluid. His verse has no more form than the liquid mud of the bog that oozes whithersoever it listeth. And that is the frightful charm of it. No thought of the poet's brain is hindered in its expression or expansion by any conventions of verse structure. It just tumbles into the world and goes wherever it wants to go, in any manner it pleases.

Take up a volume of Sandburg's poems and these so-called poems look no more like poems than a saw mill. You are tempted to throw it down as a cheat. But there's more music in the

whine of that saw and the dub-a-dub of the jostling logs, in the tumbles of the churned waters in the mill race, than in all the lyres that were ever strung in Lesbia or in the faint flutings of Arcadia.

It's the music of mud and the music of blood. It's the drop of the tear that scalds. It's the snap of the string of fate. It's the boom of the wave of doom. Go Sandburging and you step into no little varnished canoe to go paddling up some silver-shadowed stream; it's stepping aboard an ocean-going schooner whose music is in the rip of its sails, the crash of its mast, the slap of the waves and the shrilling laughter of death as on crested billows it races by. If you have the stomach for such a sail, "all aboard."

There are some things on this schooner you'll miss. You'll miss babies. There may be a cradle in Sandburg's verse but I do not recall it. Certainly there are no soft croonings and lullabies. There aren't many country scents on the vessel. There's little reminiscent of the violet or the apple blossom or the clover. In Whitman's verse grasses are green and roses sweet and swaying, in Sandburg's the grass crackles under your feet like dead sticks and his roses are dried things in an ugly jar. Sandburg hasn't eyes for nature's gentle things, but only for nature in its

violence of savagery and unreined lawlessness. He made much of the winds. No other poet has ever sent so many of them from dark cave, in wild jubilances to wing their way through life leaving only a wake of tatters and tears. No epic storms, just brat winds, squat, half-breed, hateful, that leave behind them, not ruin, but the loathsome memory of a fouling breath.

Against the background of the inexorable eons Sandburg paints with savage irony the trivial, transient. In "Flat Sands" he says:

> The sunsets pour blood and fire over you hundreds and hundreds of nights, flat lands—blood and fire of sunsets thousands of years have been pouring over you.
>
> And the stars follow the sunsets. One gold star. A shower of blue stars. Blurs of white and grey stars. Vast marching processions of stars arching over your flat lands where frogs sob this April night.

And then he says on these immemorial Flat Lands men put up signs for the minute, "Lots on Easy Terms."

Sandburg's excursions into humor are satirical. There is no crackling laughter in them, there's only the smile of sophistication and contempt of cheap sentiment. Take "Potato Blossom Songs and Jigs" and we have such sun-dried humor as this:

I wonder how far Ophelia went with Hamlet.
What else was there that Shakespeare never told?
There must have been something.
If I go bugs I want to do it like Ophelia.
There was class to the way she went out of her head.

Or this:

Does a famous poet eat watermelon?
Excuse me, ask me something easy.
I have seen farm hands with their faces in fried catfish on a Monday morning.

Or this:

Niggers play banjos because they want to.
The explanation is easy.

But such detours are never long, and pretty soon we are back on the main traveled road which is hard and sun-baked and echoes to brassy footfalls. Sandburg tries now and then to rescue himself from this down-pressing pessimism, as when he sings:

Keep a red heart of memories
Under the great gray rainsheds of the sky,
Under the open sun and the yellow gloaming embers.
Remember all pay days of lilacs and songbirds;
All starlights of cool memories on storm paths.

But the effort is only of the moment. He slides from his scented memory-mound into the mood of questioning:

Why is love always a crying thing of wings?
Why do the cradles of the sky rock new babies?

Or else he comes back to the transitiveness of all things earthy:

The buffaloes are gone.

. . . . . .

Those who saw the buffaloes are gone.

Nothing is much worth the while:

Man is a poor stick and a sad squirt;
if he is poor he can't dress up;
if he dresses up he don't know any place to go.

If there aren't many country scents clinging to the schooner, there is a swarm of city smells. This man knows the city. He knows it in its height and in its abysses, in its magnificences and in its meannesses. Temples, art galleries, exchanges, shops, factories, fish markets, Browning clubs, hod carriers' unions, skyscrapers, vistas, banana peels, parks, broad boulevards where fashion goes on airing, dark streets where furtive feet carry men looking for numbers on the houses; palaces fronting the lakeside, tenements where dust is diseased and bats fly in the night, where rats nibble and babies are born in filth; darlings of fortune and the working girls, "some with the peach bloom of young years on them," some who know "the meaning and the clue, the

how and the why of the dances and the arms that passed around their waists and the fingers that played in their hair"; Mrs. Pietro Giovannitti picking onions for Jasper "at eight cents a box" and Jasper, "who belongs to the Episcopal church and who on certain Sundays enjoys chanting the Nicene Creed with his daughters on each side of him joining their voices with his"—yes, he knows the city.

In the large, Sandburg knows the country too. Born in Gàlesburg, Illinois, in the heart of the flat lands, he knows them and the prairie has never had a nobler celebrant than this transplanted son of Sweden. He sings:

I was born on the prairies and the milk of its wheat, the red of its clover, the eyes of its women gave me a song and a slogan.

And again he sings:

O prairie mother, I am one of your boys,
I have loved the prairie with a heart shot full of pain over love.

. . . . . .

I am a brother of the Cornhuskers who say at sundown,
"Tomorrow is another day."

Yet while he knows the prairie, he knows it not as a place where the wild flowers spring and catbirds call and woolly worms crawl beneath the

lilacs, but as a thing in transition, a countryside that is to be a suburban addition, acres over which wild geese are now honking to be given over to smokestacks that "bite the skyline with stub teeth." The supreme interests of Sandburg are never in the static, though it be fixedness of utter loveliness; they are in the whirl and swirl of swift transmutations, in uprootings and upheavals and in the new growths and new forms and new dawns. So it is not the sleepy fence corner than enthralls Sandburg, it is the stir of the village, the movement of trains, the belch of factory chimneys, the litter of populous parks, the slide of the crowds along city streets.

How he loves to feel the hard ribs of a city, to measure its pulse beats, to listen to its heart-poundings. Piercing beneath its silks and its rags Sandburg paints a city's soul. Here is "Chicago":

Hog Butcher for the World,
Tool Maker, Stacker of Wheat,
Player with Railroads and the Nation's Freight Handler;
Stormy, husky, brawling,
City of the Big Shoulders.
. . . . . Laughing as a young man laughs . . . . . .
Bragging and laughing that under his wrist is the pulse, and under his ribs the heart of the people,
Laughing!

Laughing the stormy, husky, brawling laughter of Youth, half-naked, sweating, proud to be Hog Butcher, Tool Maker, Stacker of Wheat, Player with Railroads and Freight Handler to the Nation.

And he knows men:

I never had supper with Abe Lincoln,
Nor a dish of soup with Jim Hill.
But I've been around,
I know some of the boys here who can go a little,
I know girls good for a burst of speed any time.

Not so many of the privileged are in Sandburg's galleries, but, oh! thousands and thousands of shovel men, teamsters, ditch-diggers, panhandlers, fish-criers, muckers, bunk-shooters, freight-handlers, gunmen, hoodlums, prostitutes, farmers, slickers, ranchers, brakemen, killers—O yes, he knows men. In that bizarre poem, "Personality" he says:

You have loved forty women but you have only one thumb.
You have led a hundred secret lives, but you mark only one thumb.

Go round the world, he says, and win a thousand wars, but when you come back home "the print of the one thumb your mother gave you is the same print of thumb you had in the old home when your mother kissed you and said good-bye." One thumb mark and Sandburg knows that mark.

Carl Sandburg sings of many things but the heart of his verse and the heart of the man is his passion of brotherhood, a brotherhood that reaches up to the highest and down to the lowest, encompassing, enfolding not only the proud and the privileged but the poor, the derelict, the outcasts, the sweepings of the prison and the soiled doves of the street. And Sandburg tells us hotly that so long as society rots in its lower strata, society rots in its upper strata, that the individual can never be cured of his sickness until society as a whole is made well.

This show of material prosperity in restricted circles does not awe him. He tells us:

It has happened before.
Strong men put up a city and got
a nation together.
And paid singers to sing and women
to warble: We are the greatest city,
the greatest nation:
nothing like us ever was.
And while the singers sang
and the strong men listened
and paid the singers well
and felt good about it all,
there were rats and lizards who listened
. . . and the only listeners left now
. . . are . . . the rats . . . and the lizards.
. . . . . .

The feet of the rats
scribble on the door sills;
the hieroglyphs of the rat footprints
chatter the pedigrees of the rats
and babble of the blood
and gabble of the breed
of the grandfathers and the great-grandfathers
of the rats.

Duller ears hear only the song of the singers, "we are the greatest people, this is the greatest city"; Sandburg's ears catch the raspings of the rat.

He hears the silken rustlings of the skirts of luxury, but he hears too the fall of the drops of sweat by which that luxury is furnished. Listen to this savage irony:

The dago shovelman sits by the railroad track
Eating a noon meal of bread and bologna.
A train whirls by and men and women at tables
Alive with roses and red jonquils,
Eat steaks running with brown gravy,
Strawberries and cream, éclairs and coffee.
The dago shovelman finishes the dry bread and bologna,
Washes it down with a dipper from the water-boy,
And goes back to the second half of a ten-hour day's work
Keeping the road-bed so the roses and jonquils
Shake hardly at all in the cut-glass vases
Standing slender on the tables in the dining-cars.

In his *Smoke and Steel,* in the red glare of the furnace lighting up the straining bodies—"niggers, wops and bohunks" he sees and tells of the product of the mills—a bar of steel:

A bar of steel—it is only
Smoke at the heart of it, smoke and the blood of a man.

What's the matter with us? What's wrong with our civilization? The wrong, cries Sandburg, is in the falseness of our emphasis—the emphasis that is on the work and not the workman, the emphasis that is upon material bigness, material impressiveness, and not upon the human soul. He is no enemy of this material civilization of ours, but he would remind us that life's significance is not in what we do to brick and stone but in what, in our soul's soul, we are. Skyscrapers, he says, have their uses, but:

It is the men and women, boys and girls poured in and out all day that give the building a soul of dreams and thoughts and memories.

Progress is too dearly bought if it be purchased at the price of the dehumanizing of men. As, for example:

The rolling-mill men and the sheet-steel men are brothers of cinders: they empty cinders out of their shoes after the day's work; they ask their wives to fix

burnt holes in the knees of their trousers; their necks and ears are covered with smut; they scour their necks and ears; they are the brothers of cinders.

What is to be done about it? Write about the woes of the underprivileged? Sandburg pours his vitriol on all such scribblers:

Let us keep our feet in wool slippers and mix hot punches—and talk about mail carriers and messenger boys slipping on icy pavements.

. . . . . .

Let us nudge the steam radiator with our wool slippers and write poems of Launcelot the hero and Roland the hero and all the golden men who rode horses in the rain.

Lots of good all that will do. Avaunt, you strengthless singers! Tall talk gets nowhere.

Sandburg at the red ripe of him is genuinely religious, but what freezing scorn he has for the religionist who would substitute creed for deed and who comes only with a putter of words to those who are hungry and homeless and sick.

"To a Contemporary Bunkshooter" he says:

You come along squirting words at us,

. . . . . .

You tell people living in shanties Jesus is going to fix it up all right with them by giving them mansions in the skies after they're dead and the worms have eaten 'em.

You tell poor people they don't need any more money on pay day and even if it's fierce to be out of a job, Jesus'll fix that up all right, all right—all they gotta do is take Jesus the way you say.

I'm thinking now that Sandburg is talking to me, to you—that he is coming with this terrible challenge to every man who professes to be a follower of Him who says "Take up your cross and follow me"—

I ask you to come through and show me where you're pouring out the blood of your life.

I've been to this suburb of Jerusalem they call Golgotha, where they nailed Him, and I know if the story is straight it was real blood ran from His hands and the nail-holes, and it was real blood spurted in red drops where the spear of the Roman soldier rammed in between the ribs of this Jesus of Nazareth.

Verily there is nothing new under the sun—nothing new in newness. Here is the up-to-the-minute *bonnet rouge* of the barricade proclaiming the same gospel preached by the Nazarene three thousand years ago, the gospel of salvation through helping hands and helping hearts that bleed. Here from the freshly anointed lips of this Swedish-parentaged singer falls the same doctrine that has come from the dusty lips of the pulpit for these hundreds and hundreds of

years, the doctrine of deliverance through vicarious suffering. It will not do to write about our brother's needs. It will not do to talk about his needs. It will not do to cry over his needs. Nothing will do but an honest try at relieving those needs.

Yet Sandburg is not always scathing and terrible. "People singing," he says, "people with song mouths connecting with song hearts; people who must sing or die; people whose song hearts break if there is no song mouth; these are my people." After all, says Sandburg, it doesn't require many kinds of material to build the House of Happiness.

I met a marine of the U. S. A., a leather-neck with a girl on his knee, for a memory in ports circling the earth he said: Tell me how to say three things and I always get by—Gimme a plate of ham and eggs—how much?—and—do you love me, Kid?

ALDOUS HUXLEY—DARLING OF THE SOPHISTICATES

If any man is as yet unconvinced of the truth of the doctrine of heredity, is uncertain as to whether intellectual as well as physical characteristics are handed down from parents to children, to remove his last doubt he has only to look at the Adams family in America or the English Huxleys. That genius flowing in the blood of the Adamses slips from the veins of one generation into the succeeding generation, the story of the Adams family fully proves. Nor is it less patent in the Huxley tribe. Open your encyclopedias and you will find the name, Thomas Henry Huxley, a great scientist, famed, along with Darwin, as the expositor of the doctrine of evolution. There is another Huxley name, Leonard, great Greek scholar, son of Thomas Henry. There is Julian Sorrell Huxley, son of Leonard, grandson of Thomas Henry, one of the most distinguished biologists of Britain. And Aldous? Brother of Julian, son of Leonard, grandson of Thomas Henry. Julian and Aldous have yet other ties to greatness, being blood kin to Matthew Arnold and Mrs. Humphrey Ward.

Three generations of distinction. All scientists, all scholars, and all writing men of the first water. The clear and brilliant style of the grand-

father was inherited by the son and in even greater degree by the grandsons. Aldous could hardly have escaped the trade of authorship. He had Logic for his sire and Rhetoric for his dam. He was nursed on a fountain pen rather than a bottle. It was as inevitable that his soul should be drawn out into poetry and sparkling prose as that sparks be sucked up a chimney.

Here is a Grant Overton sketch of him:

To understand Aldous Huxley's work it is only necessary to have been born too late. . . . Aldous Huxley's head, all curious vaultings, is Gothic, but constrained by the circumstances of his era and the exigencies of daily living to be used rather as a laboratory than a cathedral. . . . His core of feeling is mystical. . . . A vast impatience commands his work.

This young man has been everywhere and seen everything. He subtly invites us to flee not the wrath to come but the madness here. . . . He is very tall and thin, walks with a visible stoop, and looks about him with the uncertainty of those who are new to the extreme of near-sightedness. One of his eyes is almost white. His manner is agreeable. He looks clever. He says nothing—he has no need to say anything. Almost the only "white hope" in English literature at present. He is at his best, conversationally, in a small company. . . . Mr. Huxley is witty. His humor is "hot and shining." Yet hardly a man writing can use such uncompromising, Old Testament speech. . . . His unconquerable aversions are mistiness and insincerity.

The grandson Aldous, yet in the green of middle age, is the foremost representative of the English satirical school. He looks out upon a world of misfits and mismanagements and finds nothing in it calling for his help, but everything calling for his mocking. It's just about the worst of all possible worlds, but nothing can be done about it. There's no purpose in it, no mind, no plan. There's nothing but matter. All events turn upon the workings out of blind physical forces. The mystery of character, of love, hate, ambition, devotion may turn out to depend upon the chemical action of the obscure glands.

You may say that it is not becoming to criticise, for Aldous Huxley is a man of vast erudition. He is said to know more than any other Britisher of his generation. In himself he is almost another Oxford. Yet his knowledge has bounds. He pokes fun at Pope for his endeavor to translate the *Iliad,* without knowing practically a word of Greek, but no one can convince me that Mr. Aldous Huxley knows as much about art and literature and music and the stage and politics and the currents of world-thought as Mr. Huxley's pontifical pronouncements would have us believe.

At any rate Huxley does not know all about man. The "characters" of his creation lack the breath of life. They have no independent reality.

They are but puppets, pulled by the mockery strings of this flashing Etonian.

These character-creations are all pretty much alike. They are witty, clever, bored. The yawn is the stifled yawn of London drawing rooms. All the children of Huxley's brain, as in *Antic Hay,* pronounced his best, are languid, drawling-voiced, sophisticated, patronizing, and find life a jest with a bitter cream.

I confess to a slight prejudice against the great Thomas Huxley's grandson. I resent a bit his condescension toward Americans and his unconcealed contempt for us. If in his travel essays he tells about a couple preferring to munch sandwiches in a railway station, rather than go to another church, be sure it is an American couple. If there's a loud-talking man in a company it's an American. "A Hollywood millionaire," he tells us, "is a strong, silent man with a face either like a hatchet or an uncooked muffin." He laments that the East is going Western and that within a hundred years even London will be Americanized. "The most interesting and in some cases the only readable part of most American periodicals is the advertisement section."

Hear him again:

In present-day America a handsome living is to be made by writing books about the racial characteristics of Europeans—solemn dogmatic books full of per-

fectly groundless generalizations—which are immensely popular with the "thoughtful" readers because they fit in with the political prejudices of the moment. From the books some of this intellectual swill sloshes over into the newspapers.

Of Chicago, he contents himself with saying that all their talk about "service" means anything but "service" according to the ideals of Jesus; that it mean "doing business efficiently and with just enough money to keep out of the jail." Of New York: "Successful stockbrokers come home after a day of speculation on the exchange, feeling as virtuously as Buddha must have felt when he had renounced the world and had received his great illumination." Lumping us, he finds that in America "stupidity, suggestibility and business are held up as supremely precious. Intelligence, independence, interested activity, are in process of becoming evil things which ought to be destroyed."

After a comprehensive look at us he says, "It is all movement and noise, like the water gurgling out of a bath, down the waste. Yes, *down* the waste."

Now that Mr. Huxley has become a syndicate writer and is on exhibition every week in the Hearst newspaper-string, he can yet more widely pelt us with his scorn. In all this he is in the Kipling and Shaw tradition. The more these

English literati rail at us, the more they pronounce us blockheads and upstarts, the more we revere them, the more our knees bend in thankfulness that we are privileged to eat out of their royal hands.

Dismissing prejudices you're bound to admit Aldous Huxley is a very shrewd and very clever commentator on the human comedy. Now and then he mounts his Oxford stilts and tries to high-hat the universe, but mostly he is a very human and a very witty and a very wise companion.

His travel sketches are as unique as Stevenson's and I would as lief poke around in old Italian towns and Eastern bazaars and far-off island places with Huxley as mentor as with any man I know. He has many new slants on old things and his style is both distinguished and sparkling. To travel with him is to travel with no illusions. He tells you frankly that people go traveling primarily not to see things, but because it is socially correct. You bundle off to Cairo or Samoa because the "best people" do it. To the majority, he declares, it is profoundly distasteful. They are bored and tired, and the only kick they get out of it is that they are of the privileged and have the distinction of being bored. We travel, he says, not to improve our minds, but to forget that we have any minds.

But if you go traveling with Aldous Huxley you are bound to improve your minds somewhat whether you design it or not. For here is a guide who really knows something. I have no right to pronounce on the accuracy of his knowledge, but as to its extent and variety there can be no two opinions. The man is an encyclopedia on two legs.

Open his volumes of essays and you will find dissertations there on men and places hardly to be found outside the ponderous tomes of the *Britannica.* You may have no knowledge whatsoever of such a place as Sabbioncello, such a panther as Corixolus, such an author as de Crébillon, yet after listening to Huxley's learned talk about them you reproach yourself for being such an ignoramus.

He knows science. It is not a professional knowledge, perhaps, but it is wide ranging and provocative of thought, as when combating the notion that the Italian race could have greatly degenerated in ten or twelve generations, he remarks that if this be true, man is an exception, for no other animal species changes in such a short space of time. There is no change, he says, within such time limits, in the Irish terrier, the French bulldog, the sheep dog of the Maremma, the dachshund, the Alsatian wolf-hound. So the Italians of today, he argues, cannot greatly differ

from the Italians of Dante's days. In the rôle of scientist, Huxley, true to family tradition, is modest. He confesses to superficiality, but says if he could be born again he would like to be reborn a scientist.

In his expositions of his knowledge of the drama he is not so modest. "Once," he writes, "in the course of an ill-spent life, it was my fate to go to the theatre two hundred and fifty times in one year—I was paid to go." But he went as no humble reporter. Rather he went as a killer. He found few of the plays worth while and as for the actors the least said the better. As for the first-nighters he has only the stare of wonder and a great commiseration. How can they go through with it the year round?

In one of his essays Huxley confides that the surest way to distinction is not to know what everybody else knows, but to know what others don't know. For example, he says, when somebody asks you if you have read Dickens, trot out an unknown Russian or Belgian or medieval author and begin discoursing on him. Maybe Huxley himself consciously practiced that trick. He gives you the impression that he knows more about painting and architecture and the art of the sculptor than any other man alive—which, of course, he doesn't. But if there is another critic

today who has as great a variety of artistic goods in his window display I don't know his name.

Then too he knows music. He has all the patter of the professional—whether anything beyond the patter I, of course, have no means of knowing. But it is a very pretty patter. For much of modern music he has only a frank dislike. "The susceptible maiden," he says, "is fairly made to palpitate by the luscious strains of the modern waltz . . . provocative, clotted, barbarous. Her soul is carried swooning along, over waves of syrup; she seems to breathe an atmosphere heavy with ambergris and musk." There have been great descents in music, he holds. "Since Mozart's day composers have learned the art of making music throaty and palpitatingly sensual. The arias of Mozart have a beautiful, clear purity which renders them utterly insipid compared with the sobbing, catch-in-the-throaty melodies of the nineteenth century Italians."

Yet do not get from this that Huxley is either Puritan or moralist. He is neither. He does not object to the modern music because it outrages the moralities but because it rumples the feathers of the aesthetic, not because it is seductive, but because it is cheap.

This is clearly brought out in his essay on Chaucer. For this Briton of an age long past Huxley seems to have an unbounded admiration

and a marked affinity. Huxley seems to be writing not so much about Chaucer as himself when he says:

> He has none of that strong ethical bias which is usually to be found in the English mind. He is not horrified by the behavior of his fellow-beings and he has no desire to reform them. . . .

Peasants may revolt, priests break their vows, lawyers lie and cheat and the world in general indulge its sensual appetites; why try and prevent, why protest?

"One must be an actor as well as a spectator," Huxley says somewhere. But Huxley himself is chiefly a spectator. He is no scrimmager in the game of life, only a looker-on. He has no sense of mission, has no desire to straighten out the crooked. He hears no call of need. If the banner of a good cause goes forward, well, if it goes down—what of it?

His is more than the cool detachment of the scientist, it is the aloofness of the pleasure-lover and the dilettante. He is not so much moved by the human scene as bored.

In his essay on *Accidie* he reveals not only the contemporary attitude toward life, but his own. This *Accidie,* variously defined as sloth, sadness, despair,

this sense of universal futility, the feelings of boredom and despair with the complementary desire to be anywhere, anywhere out of the world or at least out of the place in which one happens at the moment to be, have been the inspiration of poetry and the novel for a century and a half. With us it is not a sin or a disease of the hypochondries; it is a state of mind which fate has forced on us.

Now that is marking literature down pretty low. If that be true, if the novels and poetry of the last one hundred and fifty years have been born of the sense of futility, of the despair in all things, then they have been born out of the wedlock of truth and beauty, they have been born in bastardy and the sooner their pulses cease to beat the better for mankind. If that be true then the less of such literature the better. If that be true I'd vow to read no book written in the last one hundred and fifty years, would shut myself up to Marlow and Shakespeare and Ben Johnson and Beaumont and Bunyan.

If all human endeavors are futile, seeing that Fate has us all in its talons, as Huxley has just declared, obviously there can be but two attitudes toward it: one, the attitude of the bewailer, of the tearful, of the despairing; the other that of an ironic acceptance of the inevitable, a gay mocking of the malignances that grind us into powder.

Huxley classes the latter, if nothing be worth while meet the grim futility not with a sword-thrust, but with a jest. Don't get down in the arena to sweat and spill your blood, sit in the scented balconies of the looker-on and greet the spectacle with a yawn. Above all be smart, be bored, be dusted over with ennui, spatter with your indifferences the foreheads of the frowning gods.

This latter Aldous Huxley strives for and as nearly achieves as any man of his generation. Matthew Arnold, a greater Englishman, senses the futility of man's strivings and sighs; Huxley senses it and superiorly smiles.

This gay insouciance, this sparkling badinage of the inevitable, is specially characteristic of Huxley's verse. His poetry is all of the sophisticated brand. It clinks with smart sallies. It is freighted with the clichés of the salon. Occasionally sardonic, most times it lets fly the arrows of a light raillery and barbed wit.

His best known poem is "Leda." It is the tale of an unnatural and revolting Greek myth, but a tale told in such sparkling verse that its monstrosity is almost forgot. So vivid are the descriptive passages that it is easy to vision Leda and her handmaidens, when Huxley tells us,

Silent and asleep
Lie those pools now; but where they dream most deep,
Men sometimes see ripples of shining hair
And the young grace of bodies pale and bare,
Shimmering far down—the ghosts these mirrors hold
Of all the beauty they beheld of old.

The poem goes on to unfold the successful winning of Leda by the god, Jove, disguised as a white swan. "Ahs" of admiration are followed by the sound of the reader's retching and his cry of disgust that over so foul a conceit should have been thrown the mantle of such utter loveliness of verse.

Huxley's shorter poems, sometimes in the most bizarre form of free verse, sometimes cast in classic moulds, are chiefly characterized by pertnesses, flippances, irreverences, and in their sex suggestiveness in substance differ little from negroid rhythms and barbarisms, their steaming animalisms only overlaid with the sophisticated scents of the Rue de la Paix.

Here he is picturing Simeon the withered stylite who from his lofty tower is looking down upon a world given over to lust:

The steam of fetid vices
From a thousand bars
Like smoke of sacrifices
Reeked up to the heedless stars.

And the saint from his high fastness
Of purity apart
Cursed them and their unchasteness
And envied them in his heart.

How the snake hisses in verse that always gives the good the short end of the stick.

As an example of his pertness take this. He is talking about Jonah in the belly of the great fish:

Seated upon the convex mound
Of one vast kidney, Jonah prays
And sings his canticles and hymns,
Making the hollow vault resound
God and Goodness and mysterious ways,
Till the great fish spouts music as he swims.

On many occasions I think it is beyond Huxley to fit his images into a coherent whole. His metaphors and similes no more cohere than ice balls, and that's just what they frequently are, a heap of frosty balls, piled up for the glitter of their ice, the ultimate glistening of superior sophistication.

Huxley goes travelling and what does he see and hear?

Music?

The piano laboriously opened its box of old sardines in treacle. One detected ptomaine in the syrup.

Progress?

I saw a slobbering Cretin grinding at the wheel and sweating as he ground and grinding eternally. And when I perceived that he was the author of all our speed and that the music was of his making, that everything depended on his grinding wheel, I thought I would like to get off. But we were going too fast.

Beauty?

Rome was seven hills of butcher's meat, Athens an abstraction of marble. In Alexandria the steam of kidney pudding revolted the coenobites. Darkness and sun render London inappreciable. Paris is full of sparrows. The snow lies gritty on Berlin. Moscow has no verisimilitude. All the East is peopled by masks and apes and larvae. But this city of Troy is most of all real and fabulous with its *charnel* beauty.

Only the dead Troy spells beauty.

The remembrance of it is a fire that sticks and tears when I would pull it off.

Beauty that is dead is his only kind:

Sunk to the eyes in the warm sodden morass
Of his own guts, wearily, wearily
Ruminating visions of mortality.

. . . . . .

Cesspool within, and without him he could see
Nothing but mounds of flesh and harlotry.

Take a peek at Huxley's latest novel, *Brave New World.* It is perhaps his most individualistic

and characteristic creation. In contemporary literature it stands alone. Its jacket carries the announcement, "A witty and wickedly satirical novel." Its insides run true to the advertisement.

Queerly enough this pond mirrors the coming Utopia. Huxley, taking a leaf from Wells, has projected himself into the future, the long future, on whose foundations of fantasy he has posited his *Brave New World.* Whatever questionings there may be as to the fitness of the descriptive "brave," there is no doubt as to the "new."

It's new even in its chronology. Time in this new world is dated from Henry Ford—321 years B.F. or 475 A.F. This new world is a mechanized world and it is fit that it be reckoned by the advent of the world's greatest mechanic, Mr. Ford of Dearborn.

New in time, it is new in its productions of human beings. This up-to-the-minute world no longer relies on the old-fashioned ways of nature in bringing babies into the world. The opening paragraph of the book gives us the key. I quote: "A square grey building of only thirty-four stories. Over the main entrance the words, 'Central London Hatching and Conditioning Centre.' " There you have it. It is not a chicken but a baby hatchery. By the manipulation of biological forces, the gateway of human life is no longer the

maternity ward, but the bottles and the tubes of the chemist and the incubators of the hatchery.

There's nothing haphazard in this hatching. The authorities decide on just how many human beings are needed at any particular hour and regulate the supply to the demand. But not, if you please, in the lump. They decide upon just how many are needed for this or that particular occupation and not only turn out the exact quantity demanded, but being qualified, outfitted to serve in that particular occupation. And so we have varying degrees of intelligence and varieties of taste. We have Alphas, Betas, Gammas, Deltas, Epsilons. The Alphas, predestined to take the leadership of affairs, have their brains richly stocked, whereas the Epsilons, cut out to do the drudgery of the world, have little intelligence at all.

Of course the home has been abolished. There is no longer a nursery for one, two, or three children. Instead, I quote: "On all the eleven floors of Nurseries it was feeding time. From eighteen hundred bottles eighteen hundred carefully labeled infants were simultaneously sucking down their pint of pasteurized external secretion."

Above them, in ten successive layers of dormitory, the little boys and girls were as busy as anyone else, though they did not know it, listening unconsciously to hypnopaedic lessons in hygiene

and sociability, in class consciousness and the toddler's love-making. Above these were play rooms for older children—but why go on? Of all the visions of the tomorrow this of a socialized babydom is the most unlovely.

Along with the passing of the baby and the home have passed the very words "father," "mother." To speak of "father," or "mother," in this new world is to be guilty, if not of a pornographic, of a scatological impropriety.

The Hatchery flies the World State Motto: Community, Identity, Stability. "Community" means in this Huxley fantasy a community not merely of goods but of persons. Constancy to one man or one woman for a three-month period is dreadfully old-fashioned. Matings are wholly promiscuous.

How identity is secured the author does not make quite clear.

But stability is provided for. It is provided for by giving all these different classes, these Alphas, Betas, Gammas and so on only the aspirations befitting their class. It's all managed at the hatchery. The rails are laid down there on which each human life is to run—every man is in a bottle of "embryonic fixations."

All sorts of novelties of convenience and entertainment and pleasure are to be found. There

are vitro-vac massages, electrolytic shaves, televisers in every corner. There are scent organs, that give forth "ripply arpeggios of thyme and lavender and rosemary and musk." Oh, a lot of novelties.

Something though we do not find—Shakespeare's works, for example. Why? It is prohibited. "Why prohibited?" the Controller is asked. "Because it's old, that's the chief reason. We haven't any use for old things here." "Even when they are beautiful?" "Particularly when they're beautiful. Beauty's attractive, and we don't want people to be attracted by old things. We want them to like the new ones. . . . That's the price we've got to pay for stability. You've got to choose between happiness and what people used to call high art. We've sacrificed the high art. We have the feelies and the scent organ instead."

Nothing must stand in the way of happiness and happiness is freedom from self-denial. "Self-indulgence up to the very limits imposed by hygiene and economics."

Religion? Of course nothing so old-fashioned as that. The Bible went out with Shakespeare. The tablets on which the Commandments were written have been converted into door-stops for "The House of Pleasure."

"Then you think there is no God?" Mustapha Mond is asked.

"No, I think there quite probably is one."

. . . . . .

"How does he manifest himself now?"

"Well, he manifests himself as an absence; as though he weren't there at all."

Clever? Oh, it's all clever, clever the conceit of a Death conditioning room where the inmates are prepared for death, through the melodies of the scent organ, cleverness in the picture of the House for the dying where potations of soma are substitutes for prayer. But this cleverness in the garb of mime, widening its grimace to mouth-splitting by the bedside of the dying, ceases to titillate and begins to sicken.

To my somewhat old-fashioned taste this book too narrowly skirts the boundaries of the proprieties to be altogether wholesome, but all in all, it is one of the most devastating books ever written. What it licks up with clinging flame is the entire scheme of things as conceived by the leaders of this new generation. The old gods to Huxley were made largely of clay, but the new gods are made of gilt and sawdust. He satirizes the scientists who visualize the millennium in terms of applied science. He satirizes the eugenists who posit all progress on selective matings. He satirizes the socialists who dream that we shall

have set up a heaven when we have abolished the home. He satirizes our materialistic civilization, our industrial order, whose highest exhibit is a Ford car. He satirizes the satirists of the present, pulling Shaw's whiskers, tweaking Wells' nose, and reveals that the paradise of their dreams is a paradise of scentless flowers and songless birds, where youth is age and age is nothingness. Above all he satirizes the pleasure-seekers, the prophets of new social procedures, of indiscriminate promiscuities, and portrays the chalices of pleasure they grasp after as soiled by their fingers' touch, and filled with a vast emptiness. Pioneers? Rather, Huxley says, they have paved the way to the morning with peanut hulls. They have made mock of decency. They have sated themselves with cheap sensations and nauseated with it all, seeking a something that stings, seeking *pain,* they cry out, "the whip, the whip, give us the whip!"

As a satire it is supreme. As a satirist Huxley is supreme, going as far beyond Sinclair Lewis as the black-maned, flying-hoofed stallion on which Mezeppa was bound goes beyond the dray horse kicking at his traces. It is not that Huxley is not clever, it is that he is too clever and our eyes are so filled with the sparks thrown off his anvil we cannot always see whether he is fashion-

ing on that anvil a horse shoe or a sword. He is a man of outstanding and astounding gifts.

If only he might shed his cynicism. If only he would cease his mocking and begin to cheer. If only he would cease toying with bombs and take up the trowel! With such strippings he could go far, further than almost any of the younger men of today, for Huxley is still young. But with all his great gifts, up until now he is only the Darling of the Sophisticates, the tinkle of broken bits of fine glass. A shower of sparkles. An orchid too tender to withstand the buffetings of the storm. A thin voice blowing over black bogs. A fish hook often dipped in four rivers. A net of rainbows let down in a sea of stars.

RUDYARD KIPLING—ENGLISHMAN OF THE ENGLISH

I confess to a very great liking for Rudyard Kipling. It is such a liking as impels me to browse more frequently in his green pastures than those of any other poet, save one, the immortal Will. In fact, Kipling and Shakespeare are the only poets I bother to take with me on vacation days. Yet I am by no means sure I can convey to others the reasons for that liking. Indeed, it is pretty hard to convincingly tell why you like or dislike anything. Carrots you may abominate, caviar in the lingo of the school miss, you may "adore," but you would have a difficult time in making clear why your palate titillates at the sight of one and is nauseated by the sight of the other.

I do not like you, Mr. Pell,
The reason why I cannot tell.

However, for one reason, I like him because he is such a big noise. In music I have no refinement of taste whatsoever. I like the big volleying things. Almost tone deaf, the subtle nuances and involved harmonies quite escape me, but I joy like a child in the crashes of a great composition and the roar of the waters, as leaping from the ledge they make their furious plunge.

And that's why I like Kipling. He isn't a flute like Edna St. Vincent Millay. He isn't a violin touched by a Kreisler bow, as is Alfred Noyes. He's an orchestra of a hundred pieces, drums, castanets, bugles, saxophones, and all their ilk. And if now and then he slips a calliope under the tent and a half dozen others of its concaphonous kin, that too is well. Some of his hard-galloping metres give the aesthetes the shivers but what of that? There's little of delicacy in some of his verse-sprawlings, but neither is there delicacy in the huge piles of the Sierras. You can't expect a Niagara to purl like a brook. Kipling is no petty magician pulling pretty concerts out of a hat, he's a looser of the lightnings and his thunders shake the skies.

I like him not only because he is such a big noise, but because he puts on such a varied show. Accompany him and there's much to see, much to hear. You go with him along English lanes, through New England forests, over southern seas, through Indian bazaars. He tramps city streets. He rides camels over desert sands. He blazes trails through African forests. He tracks tigers to their lairs. The white spume of the sea is in him, and the hot breath of the jungle. Kipling is the singing gypsy who wanders all the world.

That word gypsy is also suggestive. For gypsies dream. Cross their palms with silver and they will see many strange and beautiful things, not less beautiful because they may not be real. Anyhow they will be interesting. For one I am tired of the Cook conductors of literature—conductors who point out things and tell you precisely what they mean. We don't want to know what they mean. Or rather we do not want to know what others think they mean. We want to be left to wonder. Kipling goes everywhere with his kodak, and his pictures are faithful photographs of men and things. But after he shows you the photographs he doesn't vex your soul by an analysis of the character the face may or may not reveal.

And for all his photographic accuracy he remains a romanticist. He takes you into a make-believe world and you see fairies rather than facts. Kipling has one of his characters invoke the deity who is "the God of Things as They Are," but having thus paid his homage to realism, he sets birds to talking, which is just as you would have it. What's the use of that marvellous power that we call imagination if you can't imagine something that isn't and if you can't imagine the unreal as being better than the real?

Further, I like Kipling in that for all his wide wanderings he is incurably provincial. He has

lived in Asia, he has lived in America, he has lived in Africa. But for all that he is, and ever will be, an Englishman, an Englishman of the straightest sect of roast-beef Britons. He sees everything through English eyes. He judges everything by English standards. He is as insular as if he had never lost sight of Devonshire hills. He is as full of prejudices as any Englishman alive. He is as narrow as a plank. He is as practical as a pen. He prefers London to Jerusalem, and even in his latest novel would tog out the twelve apostles in Bond Street clothes. Most of Europe he derides, America he sneers at. There is but one promised land and the English already possess it. In a word Kipling is deliciously priggish and provincial.

Further, he is old-fashioned in all his opinions, or more accurately in all his prejudices, in his outlooks, his manners, his ways of life. He is as Victorian as Victoria herself. The England he loves and the England he celebrates is the England that has passed, the England of Toryism, of aristocracy, of imperialism, of flaunting flag. But now aristocracy is out at the elbow. The Lords are being shorn of their fleece. London's East Side is in the saddle and London's West Side is holding on to the stirrup. Revolutionary voices are being lifted up in the universities. Writers

are following after strange gods. Old standards have been hustled to the scrap heap.

All this is distasteful to Kipling, who reverences the England that was, who saw in that England of yesterday nothing that should be altered, who loved every brick in old London. He alone among men could see a commandingness in the Marble Arch and beauty in the Albert Memorial. To Kipling a London cabby was a bonnier sight than all the charioteers of ancient Rome. The old order has passed. But Kipling still clings to it. He will have none of the newfangled in literature. He has no love for the rebel Wells, no joy in the iconoclast Shaw.

But let us take a look at the man. Of medium height or under, slightly stooped now, there's nothing remarkable in his appearance, either in his mouth or his close-clipped greyish mustache, or in his forehead or his deep set eyes that peer out at you through enormous spectacles. He might be a merchant or a bookkeeper or a college professor, a gambler in quiet clothes or a retired soldier in mufti.

He was born in Calcutta in the late sixties of the last century, taken in his childhood to England, educated there, brought back or bringing himself back to India, where immediately he took up the trade of letters and wrote after a few months, *Departmental Ditties,* followed shortly

by *Barrack Room Ballads.* At twenty years of age he found himself famous in three continents.

These were followed by short tales, by other poems, by *Plain Tales from the Hills,* by *The Light That Failed,* by *Kim.* He took a trip around the world, took an American wife, and lived for a few years in Vermont. But it cannot be said that Kipling found in America a fountain of inspiration. It is sad to say he very actively disliked us. He wedded an American girl but he had no mind to wed America. He was unwilling to undertake even a companionate marriage. All that he seems to have gotten out of New England, which he detested simply because it was not *old* England, was a number of American dollars which he received from magazine publishers for setting forth in the Kipling vernacular the several hundred kinds of plain and ornamental fools we Americans be. Soon he tired of us and went back to England, where in staid and stiff respectability he has lived and turned out books until this good hour. And though other men have shared the spotlight with him, Galsworthy, Bennett, Shaw, Wells, Walpole and a host of others, Kipling's stature has not greatly diminished and the close of nearly a half century of world recognition finds his reputation only slightly dimmed.

Kipling did two things and he seems to have done them almost equally well. He wrote tales

and he wrote poetry. The critics say that his prose tales lack this and that. The ragtime music of much of his poetry, its uncouth rhythms, its syncopated slang, cause the shivers to run up and down the goose-fleshed backs of the Oxford oracles. But the vast English speaking world goes on reading the writings of the man who cannot write. One of his panegyrists declares that no other living man is so "reverenced" by England as Rudyard Kipling. Well, that's like reverencing a lightning bolt or a trip hammer, but I can see how England admires him.

His first collection of stories appeared under the title, *Plain Tales from the Hills*—tales that had first appeared in *The Indian Statesman*—and took England by storm. They were tales of Indian life, tales of the natives and tales of the Britons in India. It was fresh material. It was handled by an artist. And it was handled in a fresh way. He slobbered over neither the British nor the Indians. He pictured the British neither as tyrannical rulers nor as beyond criticism in their colonial policies and programs. Nor did he find the natives either as beyond reproach or beyond redemption. He put pimples on the noses of the white men and warts on the faces of the yellow men.

A well-balanced book and it was written by a youth of two and twenty years. Shortly followed

Soldiers Three in which we are introduced to an Irishman, a Londoner, and a Yorkshireman—Mulvaney, Ortheris, and Learoyd—Dumas' *Three Musketeers* done in the rollicking manner of Bret Harte. Those worthies fight and drink and game and carouse and swear and love quite as convincingly as the immortals in the Frenchman's story and have permanent niches in the hall of fame.

But all these stories were more or less episodical. They were admittedly brilliant, sparkling, with a steely glitter in their style and full of bounce and gusto, but, said the critics, after all they were only *short* stories, making slight demands on invention, too small to reveal the artist. Yet, no doubt, they patronizingly added, the young author recognized his limitations and wisely stuck to the short story, knowing he could not make a long one. *Kim* was the answer. *Kim,* a novel as long as Thackeray's *Pendennis.* It did not come immediately. For ten years Kipling toiled at it, but when at last it did appear it as effectually silenced his detractors as the Seven Seals of the Apocalypse. For *Kim* had not only bulk but insight and strength. *Kim* is the story of a boy, the son of an Irishman, who in his sensitiveness to environment becomes wholly Indian in his character. He is linked with an old priest from Tibet and goes wandering all over India. The

book tells us how he felt and what he saw. And he saw much. He saw a nation comprising one-fifth of the world's population, its lands, its peoples, its manners, its politics, its philosophy, its religion. Never was there a larger canvas placed on easel and the picture is as splendid in its colorings as it is spacious. Kipling, I doubt not, there gave us on the whole the best interpretation of India we have yet had, quite as informative, I should say, as Katherine Mayo's *Mother India,* far more revealing than Mahatma Gandhi's anti-English pronouncements—the best A.B.C. we have.

Kim, aside from its psychologic interest in its portrayal of the inner life of a European boy gone native and its photographic exhibits of India's outer life, is marked by a non-partisan and judicial treatment of the whole question of Anglo-Indian relationships.

To those of you who have children and who want books for children in which grown-ups will also be interested I would heartily commend Kipling's two *Jungle Books,* whose boy hero, Mowli, a child of the jungle, brought up among tigers and parakeets and cobras, has strange tales to tell your youngsters, and the *Just-So Stories,* which make quite clear how the rhinoceros got his thick skin and the elephant its trunk.

Kipling's stories are particularly helpful to the

sedentary habited, the shut-ins, and all who are inclined to mope. For they are mostly out-of-door stories, full of action, not given to eternal self-probings or futile questionings of the sphinx that doesn't care a hoot either about your questionings or you.

As a poet Kipling is the most unique and the most unequal singer of our times. He has written some of our very best verse and unquestionably some of our very worst. How some of the poems in his collected works ever got there or were permitted to stay there is a mystery. In the main, his metres are of the long-loping kind which are most times suggestive of galloping waves, and sometimes the clinkings of tin cans. Usually they are fresh, occasionally they are just pert. In his best days Kipling cleaves the waters of the Hellespont, in his worst days he swirls in swivel. Yet strangely enough some of his poorest poems are the oftenest quoted. Take one of his best known effusions:

If I were hanged in the highest hill

. . . . . .

I know whose love would follow me still.

. . . . . .

If I were drowned in the deepest sea

. . . . . .

I know whose love would come down to me

. . . . . .

Mother o' mine, Mother o' mine.

Now, as poetry that bit of bathos might have been turned out by any sob sister engaged in writing the story of the last hours of a man sentenced to be hung. But on the other hand if Kipling had not written it, or having written it had not published it, what would the poor parsons have done who have fluttered its lachrymal stanzas on Mother's Day since observance of Mother's Day began? This "Mother o' Mine" is the weepiest poem of our times. The sentimental cry over its pathos, the critical over its cheapness. Anyhow, whatever our mood, to use a phrase from one of Fielding's novels, "we shed a bucketful of tears."

The principal themes in Kipling's verse are the sea, the barracks, the battlefield, the jungle, imperialism, hate, and love.

Kipling is the poet of the sea. He has sailed it. He has lived on it. He knows it best in its wilder moods. In his verse the sea is seldom depicted in its softer aspects, but in the moments of its mounting might and screaming savagery. There's nothing of nobility in the sea, it's as treacherous as a tiger cat, as savage as a shark. But Kipling knows these hatreds and he opposes them with sailors and ships whose stout hearts and stout planks most times get the victory. Kipling has certainly gotten inside the skin of the sailorman. He knows his language and he

knows his moods. Nor even less accurate is his knowledge of ships. When Kipling comes aboard a schooner or a sampan or a man-o'-war he is at home. Not even Conrad who spent all his early life at sea knows so much about sails and bottoms and engines and guns as this land-bred Kipling. Read his *The Ship That Found Itself* and you are listening to the voices of the ship itself—its groans, its low cursings, its despairings and its screaming exultations. It is one of Kipling's greatest poems.

Of the barracks and their portrayals in *Barrack Room Ballads* and *Departmental Ditties* I am less enamored. Here Kipling has no illusions. He sees Tommy's lot with precious little romance in it and a lot of drills and hardtack and hard drinking and coarse loving and an infinitude of cuss words. Yet his Tommies for all their rawnesses and their rowdyisms are not without appeal and we feel the stab of pity when through thrust of Afghan lance a Tommy slouches into a thing. Tommy's superiors are also painted in an uncompromising fidelity to fact. Courageous they are, but they swank and swagger, and on the whole, outside strictly soldier rôles, about the only thing you can say of them in praise is that they are better than their wives. These are a frowzy, flea-bitten lot. The less said of them the better.

When Kipling strikes the lyre to sing of human passions of despair and hope, of joy and sorrow, of love and hate it is sometimes with an unsure touch. His songs of revenge and hatred are strong in their fluent melodies. There is in them the scrape of knives and the knock of gun-butts and the deadly patience that waits to kill. But in the realms of the gentler passions he is less convincing. He can give faithful portraitures of tropic loves, the loves that are flames and leave all in ashes; he can sing the love-songs of the jungle where body calls to body, blood to blood; he can paint in utter fidelity the tawdriness of the fleeting and promiscuous *amours* of the "post"; but the heights of a love for man to woman and woman to man, where the brow of passion feels the touch of the cool leaves of idealization and respect and soul homage woven into green coronets, are beyond the reach of his wing. I do not mean it as dispraise—no man can do everything equally well—but I can but feel that the bridal march in Lohengrin could be better played by Kipling to the hot-breathed things of the forest than to the audience in the church.

Above all, however, Kipling is pre-eminently the poet of Imperialism. He really conceives England as divinely commissioned to subdue the lesser breeds and through infinite toiling and infinite patience to beat them somewhat into Brit-

ain's pattern. It is not always a pleasant task. It is not always a profitable task. But it is a task which Englishmen are called upon to perform. He calls it "the white man's burden." But even if it be burden it must be borne till backs break. It's a sort of Holy War these most unholy Tommies are so often called upon to wage and there's no escape from it. There's honor in it. There's glory. And, occasionally, Kipling will admit, there's gold. But if there were no honor and no glory and no gold Kipling would still be calling for it. He would be clamoring for it because he likes it. He scorns the thin milk of pacifism. He believes in might.

Oh, East is East and West is West and never the twain shall meet
Till Earth and Sky stand presently at God's great Judgment Seat;
But there is neither East nor West, Border nor Breed nor Birth
When two strong men stand face to face, though they come from the ends of the Earth.

But while, by implication, Kipling grants that a strong man may come from the East, he certainly believes that not *many* strong men may come from that quarter. No, these are the "lesser breeds" to be pricked by British bayonets and to be prodded, not lured, along the path of progress, if indeed there be—which Kipling

gravely doubts—any path of progress for bare or sandaled feet.

To Kipling's ears all this talk about freeing India and breaking the back of English rule is the talk of the dreaming sentimentalist. The only proper thing for Indian malcontents is to club them. The East, he says, mistakes tolerance for weakness, kindness for cowardice. Never mind about books and schools and missionaries and self-government for these smelly Indians, give them a dose of lead.

If you ask about Mr. Kipling's religious views, opinions, beliefs, the precise answer is not in his books. We only know that he is not under the red banner of a Shaw or a Wells. A conformist in all things else, in manners, conventions, politics after the Tory pattern, Kipling could hardly be a non-conformist in religion. Say of social usages and say of the economic order and say of the state "As in the beginning, so now and ever shall be" and you'll say it of the church. In all save verse harking back to Victorian standards, you'd expect in Kipling a bit of the stiffening of the Thirty-nine Articles and along with his acceptance of the traditions of Westminster, his acceptance of the Established Church. Kipling will have no truck with Socialism. He will have no truck with Sovietism. He will have no truck

with Shaw's and Wells' radicalisms. He will have no truck with irreligion. His great "Recessional," the poem that shook the heart-pulse of the world, reveals a profoundly religious soul:

God of our fathers, known of old
Lord of our far-flung battle line,
Beneath whose awful hand we hold
Dominion over palm and pine—
Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet,
Lest we forget—lest we forget!

The tumult of the shouting dies,
The Captains and the Kings depart.
Still stands thine ancient sacrifice,
An humble and a contrite heart.
Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet,
Lest we forget—lest we forget!

Far called, our navies melt away;
On dune and headland sinks the fire;
Lo, all our pomp of yesterday
Is one with Nineveh and Tyre!
Judge of the Nations, spare us yet,
Lest we forget—lest we forget!

If drunk with sight of power we loose
Wild tongues that have not thee in awe,
Such boastings as the Gentiles use,
Or lesser breeds within the law—
Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet,
Lest we forget—lest we forget!

For heathen heart that puts her trust
In reeking tube and iron shard,
All valiant dust that builds on dust
And guarding, calls not Thee to guard,
For frantic boast and foolish word—
Thy mercy on thy people, Lord!

There's just one other thing I want to say about Kipling. He's a man of clear vision and frank speech. He knows a spade when he sees it and calls it a spade. He labels coarse things with coarse words. In treatment of things once taboo he is no mid-Victorian, no nice lady of a man. And yet for all his realistic portrayals of barroom things and the amatory promiscuities of the post, for all his openness, Kipling gives not the slightest suggestion of verbal halitosis or need of censor deodorizers.

Admittedly, at the present moment, he's in partial eclipse. He's outmoded, we hear. He seems to be no present voice of England, of her politics, her materialistic preoccupations, and social strivings. He's old fashioned. Along with Dickens and Tennyson and Scott, he's on the shelf. But even so those man-faces looking down from dusty eminence seem somehow more commanding than the heat-blown faces of the little men who are so frantically contending for pre-eminence in the arena of the world's regard. Fashions change. The new becomes old, the old comes back. My

prophecy would be that when voices of Shaw and Wells and Bennett and Huxley have died down into silence, the music of some of Kipling's poems, certainly that of the "Recessional," will still be locked in the treasuries of the world's memory and be echoing in the hearts of living men.

EDNA ST. VINCENT MILLAY—THE CONTEMPORARY LARK

In the crotch of a giant tree, near an old barn on a New England hilltop, has been built a famous studio. It is that of Edna St. Vincent Millay. A studio in a treetop is a very unusual thing, but Edna St. Vincent Millay is a very unusual woman. A studio bottomed on swaying boughs is the only fit place for a lark and a lark's song.

This American lark broke through her shell at Rockland, Maine, in 1892, and for twenty years and more has been pouring forth a music fresh as the dawn, sweet as love's murmurings in sylvan shades.

Miss Millay's genius, as is the way of poets, came early to bloom. At the age of nineteen she startled the world with "Renascence," a poem incredibly strong; a poem that for its maturity might have fallen from the wise lips of Elizabeth Browning in her forties, and yet was filled with the bright carillons of youth. Had Edna St. Vincent Millay died immediately thereafter she would still have been entitled to a niche in the hall of the immortals. For boldness of conception, vigor of style, freshness of melody, not even a Shelley, at like age, had surpassed it.

Her next important work, if I mistake not, was "Figs and Thistle," and upon its publication the world recognized that this New England-born, Vassar-trained girl was one of the authentic singing voices of our time. This slim little volume has been pronounced both pert and Pan-like. To me it is neither; it is the voice of youth. A bit too bumptious, maybe, too cocksure, straining rather overmuch toward cleverness, but for all that showing the thrusting tongue of a brain not sluggish, not bound by precedent, not in thrall to convention—a fresh, unstudied song, springing from the golden thickets of youth. If age smiled a little over its exuberances, youth claimed it as its best own. This is what and how we see, the youthful generation said; this is how and what we feel.

While in Vassar Miss Millay had tried her hand at play writing and one, at least, of her plays, "Two Slatterns and a King," had been produced on the college stage. School days over she set herself to the very prosaic yet necessary task of earning her living. She thought she could do it by writing poetry. But poetry is far from the most salable of commodities. It's a difficult matter to turn "Figs and Thistles" into bread. Nearly all our American poets nowadays somehow gravitate to New York and so did Miss Millay, to that oddish part known as Greenwich

Village, home and rendezvous of writers, painters, sculptors, illustrators, musicians, geniuses, cranks. Living was cheap in Greenwich Village, but it was not quite cheap enough for Miss Millay. The poetess literally would have starved had she not sought out and found small theatrical parts to fatten her too slim poet's purse. Acting, directing, writing, she went blithesomely over a pretty rough way until at long last she came to national and to international recognition and plump gold coins in plenty were paid for golden verse.

The lark was busily singing. Her next thin volume was a bit disturbing, it must be granted, to many of Miss Millay's admirers—sonnets that missed the questionable only by the thickness of a hair. Followed *The Hermit Thrush, The Harp-Weaver and Other Poems, The Fatal Interview, The Buck in the Snow.* Plays, too, came along with the poems. Miss Millay is not the most prolific of our writers, but in my judgment she has written more lines that will be enduring, that will be palpitantly alive a hundred years from now, than any other American writer of our times. No less a man than Thomas Hardy declared that America had but two noteworthy things, its recessional skyscrapers and the poetry of Edna St. Vincent Millay.

Confessedly I am a bit embarrassed in saying anything of Miss Millay. I can say my say about Mencken and Lewis and Dreiser without timidity, for I feel that I am dealing with dishes of earthenware, coarse, strong, that will have their place in the pantry, maybe, for a few decades. I am not nervous in their handling. But Miss Millay's verse is something fine and fragile, irreplaceable, whose breakage would be a loss irreparable. It is like handling a Chinese porcelain vase, of a remote dynasty, that has been fashioned by an artist and smoothed with the loving looks and reverent touch of hundreds and hundreds of years. What if one should let it fall? Of course I can break neither the coarse crock nor the glowing vase—both are beyond the breaking by my fumbling fingers—but at any rate, I have the fear that I may leave a finger mark on the porcelain, while I don't give a rap how many grease-spots I may leave on the crocks.

In the field of dramatic composition, one must grant that though Miss Millay has verve, movement, sparkle of dialogue, her dramas never scale the heights. In lyrical outpourings she is supreme, but in dramatic compositions only a brilliant second-rater. She is out-topped by a dozen playwrights of the day.

Her "Two Slatterns and a King," produced at Vassar, though humorous is slight. "The

Lamp and the Bell'' is remarkable chiefly for its quips and clever conceits. Yet there are a few lines whose beauty catches in the throat. Such lines as these:

> The foot stumbles,
> The hand hath its own awkward way; the tongue
> Moves foolishly in the mouth; but in the heart
> The truth lies.

And these:

> Whether I be false or true,
> Death comes in a day or two.

Perhaps the most unified and the strongest of Miss Millay's plays is her most recent one, ''The King's Henchman.''

Miss Millay as a poet, however, is in an entirely different world. Here she finds her true form of expression.

The first thing that impresses you about Miss Millay's poetry is that it is pretty expensive. There is, I think, no single-volume collection of her poems. To read them all you will have to buy a dozen volumes. I suggest a call on the Public Library.

The second impression is that it's strange in its forms. While sometimes casting her verse in classic moulds she oftener uses a mould peculiar to herself. It's free verse. It is indifferent to rhyme, sometimes employing that artifice, some-

times not. It is maybe more like Robert Frost in manner than any other poet, but less like Frost than Edna St. Vincent Millay. Her rhythms too are unusual but most times poignantly lovely.

Miss Millay is a rebel, but she rebelled against the ancient forms not for the sake of rebelling, but because of the untrammeled freedom of the new forms. She chose the forms new or old in which she could best express herself; and that is genius.

Beyond any other poet I know Miss Millay achieves her effects by use of the simplest language. Now and then she uses a tall word, but some of her poems are composed wholly of words that might have been plucked from a primer. Take the first four lines in her "Renascence":

> All I could see from where I stood
> Was three long mountains and a wood;
> I turned and looked another way,
> And saw three islands and a bay.

Only three words of more than one syllable. Or her first "Fig,"

> My candle burns at both ends;
> It will not last the night;
> But ah, my foes and oh, my friends
> It gives a lovely light.

It is not only the simplicity of words, but of themes. These themes are as homely as those

of Edgar Guest; in the main, poems that grew out of the common sights and sounds and experiences and emotions of men. And yet these commonest things are so invested with the glamour of her genius that they seem as shimmering things in the land of Faerie. Hers is a talent that can convert a gnarl or a weed into loping lines that slap and sing.

And yet for all this simplicity and this commonness, there is strength. Such delicacies as are in Miss Millay's poems you can match elsewhere—Christina Rosetti, for example, is her equal here. Such strength, too, you can find in other books. But where outside of Miss Millay's verses will you find such perfect mating of fineness and of strength, of sense and sentimentality, of granite and of grace? Stand in the forest and you hear the sweet, fluttery notes of the bird; stand by the seashore and you hear the crash of mountainous waves; but here in the skull of this New England girl you have both the forest and the sea, both the call of the lark and the thunder of the surge.

If Miss Millay had no distinctive doctrines to proclaim, no specific causes to forward, if she had no special body of truth to champion, she would still have right to sing, just for the sheer beauty of the song itself. Beauty is its own justification. You do not ask of a rose that it sweep

your floor. Miss Millay is in herself Beauty's face and voice. She has right to sing as lilies have right to bloom.

Sometimes Miss Millay sings just as babies prattle. Take this, "The Poor Little Goat Down in Glengarriff Bay":

Once upon a time a little black goat
Was rowed to an isle in a little flat boat,
To a lonely isle out in Glengarriff Bay,
And the goat went ashore and the boat went away;
And the boat went away while the goat was asleep,
And it left him alone where there weren't any sheep,
Where there weren't any cows and there weren't any hogs,
And there weren't any cats and there weren't any dogs;
And there weren't any hens and there weren't any lice,
And there wasn't a barn and there wasn't a boat,
Just a bare little isle and a black little goat.

Sometimes she is just spoofing, as in her widely discussed "Thursday,"

And if I love you Wednesday,
Well, what is that to you?
I do not love you Thursday,
So much is true.

And why you come complaining
Is more than I can see.
I love you Wednesday—yes—but what
Is that to me?

Or this,

> You took my little laughing vice
> And left it out in all the rain,
> My little vice caught cold and died
> And I live on in hushed pain
> And listen for its laugh again.

But pushing through these anterooms of teasing and nonsensicalities what do we find?

For one thing we find a love for nature—nature in all its variety—and that love, eager, intense, puts every blessed thing to singing, whether it be butterfly or daisy, the sun when it is red or the moon when it is dark. She loves them all,

> Strange queer things are akin to me—
> Winds that cry in the beechwood tree,
> Mists that drift and drag and rise,
> The blood-red moon in the leaden skies,
> Storms that shatter the sultry sea,
> Knots that gnarl in the beechwood tree,
> Strange queer things are akin to me.

Wordsworth was no greater nature lover than Miss Millay, but while Wordsworth's eye pierces through the things of nature to nature's God, Miss Millay's eyes are so enraptured by the beauties of nature itself that they look not so much through as at. So while she misses the deeper meanings, she gives us the clearer picture. So beautiful is the world she sees that she cries,

O world, I cannot hold thee close enough!
Thy winds, thy wide gray skies!
Thy mists that roll and rise!
. . . Lord, I do fear
Thou'st made the world too beautiful this year.
My soul is all but out of me—let fall
No burning leaf; prithee, let no bird call.

And again she sings,

What is the need of Heaven
When Earth can be so sweet?

Portraitures of woman also abound in her poetry. "Miss Millay," says Carl Van Doren, "reveals women as they are and not as they are supposed to be." Which is important, if true. Men writers have dissected woman, but we have the notion that what they are dissecting is not the woman, but their own foolish dreams of her. Women writers, of course, are quite competent to do the job, but we have the uneasy feeling that they haven't told all. They will write frankly about everything else in the world, but not of their own sex. Woman's portraiture of women is not quite convincing and the mystery remains as dense as ever.

But here, says Mr. Van Doren, is the real thing—Miss Millay reveals women not as they are supposed to be, but as they are. According to Mr. Van Doren there is quite a gap between

what women really are and what they are supposed to be. Now what does Miss Millay give us? She's as frank and as open as the sun. This, she says, is what a woman really thinks, how a woman really feels, what a woman really is. To give her answer in its fulness would be to tear out the heart of nearly all her sonnets, but, in brief, the woman Miss Millay gives us is so like a man that she is distinguished only by her clothes and her lipstick. She has the same outlooks as man. The same physical and mental and spiritual urges as man. The same reactions to outer circumstances, the same nobilities, and the same meannesses, the same opennesses and concealments. Miss Millay unveils the mysteries by the declaration that there are no mysteries; she solves the problem by showing us there is no problem to solve.

Miss Millay, whatever else she may be, is a celebrant of beauty. She finds beauty even in the lack of things, in crevices as well as in chunks.

I drank at every vine,
The last was like the first.
I came upon no wine
So wonderful as thirst.

I gnawed at every root.
I ate at every plant,
I came upon no fruit
So wonderful as want.

Now you can't go beyond this. To find, as Miss Millay finds, that everything is beautiful and then to find beauty also in life's misses and life's voids is the ultimate of appreciation.

If Miss Millay finds the universe a universe of beauty, as she does, then one ought to be happy, ought to be joyous in such a universe. *She* would be joyous,

> I will be the gladdest thing
> Under the sun!
> I will touch a hundred flowers
> And not pick one.

This determination to be glad is not arrived at without vision, or without struggle. Joy will not come through being wise. In "The Buck in the Snow" she says:

> Wisdom, heretic flower, I was ever afraid
> Of your large cool petals without scent.

And in "The Hermit Thrush,"

> Of course, it's past,
> But what has happened to it—
> That little moment not so long ago?
> We knew it wouldn't last—
> Of course we knew it!
> But if we knew so much
> Why was it so?

No, you don't enter into joy through the gate of knowledge. But neither does she find joy through

illusion and the maskings of the ugly with pretty words.

> Want is want no matter what the reason
> Tears are tears no matter how we cry.

She faces, as others have faced, the transiency, the fickleness of love, but, unlike most other singers, there is no bitter on her lips as she sings of it,

> I would, indeed, that love were longer lived,
> And vows not quite so brittle as they are.
> But so it is, and nature has contrived
> To struggle on without a break thus far—
> Whether or not we find what we are seeking
> Is idle, biologically speaking.

She finds joy though she has found wrongs and injustices in the world. She lashes the wrongdoer, she pillories the unjust, and then she goes on her way—singing. The execution of the two communists, Sacco and Venzetti, a few years ago brought her indignation to white heat and called forth one of the most fiery phillipics ever penned. In *The Last Thanksgiving of Massachusetts* she lets fall her scorpion whip upon the back of the Bay State and leaves it a bloody pulp, and then from the horror of that flagellation she goes forth to live

> Among her garden ways,
> Like a bird that loves to sing.

She finds joy though she has found anguish,

The anguish of the world is on my tongue,
My bowl is filled to the brim with it; there is more than I can eat.

Yet when she has eaten this bitter bread,

While the blush of the early morning
Reds the path of the nimble goat,
I will climb up the crimson mountain
To find the sun on the sail of a boat.

She has felt loneliness too:

She has kept that kettle
boiling all night long for company.

And again,

Love has gone and left me—and the neighbors knock and borrow,
And life goes on forever like the gnawing of a mouse—
And tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow
There's this little street and this little house.

Yet from the windows of that little house she sees a bobolink "chuckling and singing, charging the rainy cloud," and she cries out in ecstasy,

I shall never be sad again
I shall never be sad again.

Miss Millay, as are all sensitive souls, is greatly preoccupied with death. She sings much of "the hot and sorrowful things of the dust." "I am not resigned," she says, "to the shutting away of the loving hearts in the hard ground." Nor is she less resigned to the death of an ideal.

> But that a dream can die, will be a thrust
> Between my ribs forever of hot pain.

Yet despite all this, the transiency of love, the fading of beauty, the loneliness of life, the scorch of wrong, the wrench of agony, spite the drench of the dark and the mists of death that rise and roll, Edna St. Vincent Millay remains ever the celebrant of joyous youth. The lark in the tree-top still sings, and if the sun is not shining it goes singing in the rain.

In no other of Miss Millay's poems is her unquenchable love of beauty and her springing joyousness so clearly set forth as in her poem, "Renascence."

In that justly celebrated poem she is lying upon the earth looking up at the sky, brooding over birth and death and all the mysteries and problems that lie between, when suddenly, though quietly, the earth opens beneath her and she sinks into her grave, "full six feet under ground,"

Deep in the earth I rested now;
Cool is its hand upon my brow,
And soft its breast beneath the head
Of one who is so gladly dead.
And all at once and over all
The pitying rain began to fall.

Other sights and sounds of the world she misses, and she cries

How can I bear it; buried here,
While overhead the sky grows clear
And blue again after the storm?
. . . . . .
O God, I cried, give me new birth
And put me back upon the earth.

Swift came the answer. Life came back to her again.

A sense of glad awakening
The grass a-tiptoe at my ear,
Whispering to me I could hear;
I felt the rain's cool finger tips
Brushed tenderly across my lips,
Laid quietly on my sealed sight,
And all at once the heavy night
Fell from my eyes and I could see—
A drenched and dripping apple tree,
A last long line of silver rain
A sky grown clear and blue again.
. . . . . .

Up then from the ground sprang I
And hailed the earth with such a cry
As is not heard save from a man
Who has been dead and lives again.
About the trees my arms I wound;
Like one gone mad I hugged the ground;
I raised my quivering arms on high;
I laughed and laughed into the sky,

Till at my throat a strangling sob
Caught fiercely, and a great heart-throb
Sent instant tears into my eyes;
O God, I cried, no dark disguise
Can e'er hereafter hide from me
Thy radiant identity.
. . . . . .
God, I can push the grass apart
And lay my finger on Thy heart!

The world stands out on either side
No wider than the heart is wide;
Above the world is stretched the sky—
No higher than the soul is high.
The heart can push the sea and land
Farther away on either hand;
The soul can split the sky in two
And let the face of God shine through.
But East and West will pinch the heart,
That cannot keep them pushed apart;
And he whose soul is flat—the sky
Will cave in on him by and by.

For noble thinking set to noble music "Renascence" stands well nigh alone. That, like Edna St. Vincent Millay, you may push apart the East and West of Life's hard practicalities so that they may not crush the heart—that you may

> . . . . split the sky in two
> And let the face of God shine through

is my wish, my prayer, for one and all.

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW—THE CONTRADICTORY JESTER

You have all heard of the chameleon who true to the ways of a chameleon—changing to the colors of the thing which is nearest—found itself on an Oriental rug and in vain endeavor to adjust itself to the rug's changing hues—burst! Such a fate is likely to befall any luckless wight who endeavors to understand the complexity which is Shaw. For this famed Irishman is as vari colored as a Sarouk, with this added bedazzlement, the colors change before your eyes, the blues pass into greens, the greens to yellows, and that which a moment ago was purple is now black.

Nobody understands Shaw save Shaw—and God. And if I were as irreverent as Shaw I would say that even God does not understand him. Shaw is not unintelligible because of his English, that is as clear as day, as crisp as the dawn—just about the best English that is being written in these times. If I were a teacher of homiletics in a theological school I think I should put my students through a course of shavian sprouts just to knock their long-windedness out of them and show them how terse, sinewy sentences ought to be turned out. Shaw the philosopher I hold

only third-rate, but Shaw the stylist I put well nigh at the top.

No, Shaw's unintelligibility is not the unintelligibility of language obscurities but of contradictions of moods. You never know whether he is in jest or earnest. When he seems most straight faced he may be crackling with inner laughter, and when he has on the jester's cap, he may be most in earnest. He will come with melancholy mien to report a prize fight—you recall he has reported prize fights—and appear at a funeral in the robes of a harlequin. With him mystification is a fine art. John Bunyan's "Mr. Facing Both Ways" is a back number. George Bernard Shaw is a Mr. Facing All Ways. By that I do not mean that he lacks sincerity, or adherence to life's programs, nor that he sets his sails to catch the breezes of the moment. No such thing. The man undoubtedly thinks he is going somewhere, but, for our puzzlement, gives out so many contrary directions as to the road, and half time declares that there isn't any road, or anything for road to lead to, that you wonder not only as to the reality of the road, but the reality of the pilgrim.

Belying his blood—Shaw is an Irishman and all the Celts are thought to be warm-hearted folk —Mr. Shaw is an unusually self-centered man. Oscar Wilde hit him off to a T when he said,

"Shaw has no enemies and none of his friends like him." I should hazard that Shaw would never go out of his way to help anybody, nor would he yet swerve aside many inches to keep from running over anybody who is in his way. And he would run over a man not because he is cruel, but because Shaw's business seems to him more important than anybody else's business, and to get to his own end quickly is of more concern than the broken back of the man who is ground beneath his wheels. Shaw is for socialism; Shaw is for Ibsen; Shaw is for peace; Shaw is for internationalism. But above everything else Shaw is for Shaw. This shines out in his correspondence with Mrs. Patrick Campbell and Miss Ellen Terry, whom he frankly tells that he loves for their charms, but above all that he loves them for the copy he can make out of them. He is the sort of man who would kiss a woman not so much because he loves her lips, but because he could put down in a book the tingle of the experience.

Shaw likes to tell a tall story. He wants to capture his readers and as true stories are not always tall stories Shaw has no scruples in drawing upon his fancy for the extra needed inches. Usually it is just the innocent fish story in which minnows grow to be whales, as when writing of his residence at Stratford-on-Avon: "This is a

gigantic house with sixteen hall doors, rooms that no man has ever counted, a conservatory like the Crystal Palace, seventy-six bathrooms and thirteen hundred miles of corridor." Now if exaggeration were shut up to the jocular it would be quite all right, but in many of his most serious writings he indulges in the same elephantine exaggerations. A treatise on philosophy or religion is done in the manner of an aviator writing in sky letters the name of a cigarette.

If Shaw then is not always taken seriously just when he wants to be taken seriously the blame is at his own door.

Above everything else Shaw loves to shock his public. He loves it for several reasons. One, I think, is that he deeply believes that the public needs to be shocked. That in no other way can it be waked up, jostled out of its sunning complacences, its drugging self-satisfaction. It is his way of securing attention, and Shaw, it must be admitted, does not have a very high opinion of his kind. "You ask me," he wrote Miss Terry, "why everybody should think everybody else corruptible? Because everybody *is* corruptible."

George Bernard Shaw is the peacock of literature. When he spreads his rhetorical tail the planets come down to look and wonder. Here is a trait insusceptible of exaggeration. Shaw himself does not deny it, does not conceal it, but

sticks it as a feather in his hat and wears it as brave adorning. Ofttimes he writes in mock humor of his self-confessed greatness, but to Shaw it is one of the great realities. Here are a few examples:

Writing of *Candida* he says, "I always read it to the people. They can be heard sobbing three streets off." He writes to Miss Terry that if she and Henry Irving go to America for the season he (Shaw) will not have the opportunity of "teaching" them how to act.

"I am a magnificently successful man."

"I have no objection whatever to an intelligent cutting out of the dead and false bits of Shakespeare. But when you propose to cut me I am paralyzed at your sacrilegious audacity. I always cut myself to the bone."

"Curious how little use mere brains are! I have a very fine set; and yet I learned more from the first stupid woman who fell in love with me than ever they taught me."

"I made a tearing speech and was insufferably pleased with myself." "Nobody can write exactly as I write; my letters will always be a little bit original."

Referring to his emergence from poverty: "I got a job and bought a suit of clothes with the proceeds. A lady immediately invited me to tea,

threw her arms round me and said she adored me. I permitted her to adore, being intensely curious on the subject. Since that time whenever I have been left alone in a room with a female she has invariably thrown her arms around me and declared that she adored me. It is fate."

"To most women one man and one lifetime make a world. I require whole populations and epochs to engage my interests seriously and make the writing machine (for that is what G. B. S. is) work at full speed and pressure."

Here is another precious bit: "I have made Shakespeare popular by knocking him off his pedestal and knocking him around the place and making people realize that he's not a demi-god but a dramatist."

When he writes to Miss Terry, "And yet if it would be a blessed thing to have you, it is the next blessedest thing to want you—better than being hard and hellish as I now am for longer and longer stretches because I have no time or opportunity to exercise my heart," you feel he is wholly out of character. He strikes his true vein when he writes to Ellen, "You may chop off all my fingers and toes for a necklace and have my heart as a locket if you will only say that you like them better than diamonds." There's the real Shaw. He knows that his fingers and toes are quite safe.

The scope of Shaw's genius is disclosed in his capitalization of the fine art of abuse. He proceeds upon the principle that the shortest cut to any man's attention is to abuse him. He heaps ridicule upon his countrymen, tells them just how stolid, stupid and hopeless they are, and they eat out of his hand. To use one of Shaw's favorite words there's nothing quite "nasty" enough that he can say about Americans and yet Americans more than half support him. It is perhaps natural that Shaw should have this slant on Americans. Dickens came over to this country and impaled us on the pen points of abuse and we repaid him by buying all his books. Matthew Arnold came over to see us and the ice formed on his spectacles while he was looking at us, but we paid him a thousand dollars a night for excerpts from his vast disdain. So Shaw feels that following our lick-spittle traditions we shall pay him so much per tick, and pay him we have.

It is somewhat unusual to find a successful author whose boyhood love was not letters, and who in early life did not dream of writing as a vocation. But such was Shaw. In his youth he had little love for literature, but a consuming love for music and painting. The concert halls and picture galleries of Dublin and later of London were his habitual haunts. Yet though with a passionate adoration of both music and painting and

a dabbler in both, he had not skill enough to secure a livelihood in either and as the next best thing took to writing about the things he could not create.

His career as a musical critic, though not long, was brilliant. For almost the first time in its history the London papers for which he contributed his criticisms were absolved from puffs and empty gurglings of praise and became truly alive to artistic values and a discerner between the meretricious and the good. His criticisms were ofttimes caustic, but causticity became early his stock in trade, and though he had no hesitancies in giving pain he yet seldom yanked out the wrong tooth. If dispraise were called for by the performance he gave it with great gusto; if praise, though grudgingly, he gave it. In the fields of music as elsewhere he was quick to discern merit in the newcomer and lauded Wagner to the skies when most of his fellow musical critics consigned him to hell.

His criticisms of pictures were in the same vein of bleak sincerity and he threw up a job as critic because over his name the newspaper editor had inserted appreciation of pictures Shaw had never, in reality, praised.

The transposition from a critic of music and pictures to that of the drama was easy. In this rôle Shaw was sometimes the inspiration of bud-

ding playwrights and actors, but more often their terror. His whip drew blood. No great names dazzled him, and upon the backs of established reputation his lash fell as savagely as upon the shoulders of the parvenues. The man was wholly destitute of reverence and strolling through the Pantheon, one after the other of the immortals he would bring tumbling down from its pedestal. He boldly declared that Shakespeare was dramatically dead. He promised that some day he would rewrite Hamlet so as to bring out its real meaning. In all these slashings-out Shaw no doubt thought himself the dispassionate critic, but the fact was that he had swallowed Ibsen, hook, sinker, line, and fishing pole, and this huge morsel so irritated his intellectual entrails as to make impossible a balanced judgment on opposing authors and schools. Shaw undoubtedly has the worst case of Ibsenitis on record. He extols Ibsen to the skies. He decapitates all his rivals. The form of his own plays is Ibsen's. Their spirit is Ibsen's. In fact, his ideas largely derive from Ibsen and many are the shavian conceits that were rifled from the great Norwegian's grave.

Sparing not the great playwrights, we could hardly expect Shaw to spare his contemporary actors and actresses. If Shaw had any enthusiasm for the players of his time except Mrs. Pat-

rick Campbell and Miss Ellen Terry that enthusiasm was most admirably restrained. Mansfield was just so-so, Duse had unmistakable gifts, but Henry Irving he could not abide. He spoke about Irving's "little narrow cutlet of a forehead," his lack of brains, his often faulty technique, and expressed the wish that he had time and opportunity to show him how to act.

But despite these limitations Shaw was the unquestioned maker of public opinion, indubitably set the styles of his day. Believing that the theatre of today is an institution as important as was the church in the sixteenth century, he was as greatly concerned about theatrical technique as the churchmen about their creeds.

It was an epoch-making night when this young Irishman found himself in a hall listening to America's part-socialist, Henry George. It is difficult for us of today to calculate the tremendous influence Henry George's *Progress and Poverty* had, not only upon America, but upon the whole of Europe. It was the reading of this book that shaped the career of Ramsay MacDonald; it was the listening to a speech by the author of the book and the book's subsequent reading that made a socialist of Bernard Shaw. What Henry George began in Shaw, Karl Marx finished. After the reading of Marx's *Das Kapital* Shaw became the reddest of the Reds. In a little while Shaw

fell out with Marx, chiefly with Marx's doctrine of values and the inevitableness of the class struggle, and became a member of the Fabian Society. This organization had then, as now, many of England's intellectuals. Shaw upholds its tenets and Wells and Ramsay MacDonald and Philip Snowden—in fact at one time the whole Labor party of England. It differs from Marxism and Leninism and Stalinism in this: that it advocates progress through evolution rather than through revolution, holds that transitions from capitalistic to socialistic states should be gradual, rather than abrupt. It is close akin to the socialism of Norman Thomas and others of America's intelligentsia.

However, while Shaw is theoretically at odds with Marxism, when he came back from Russia last summer, along with Lady Astor and others, he had only glowing eulogies of Stalin and the whole Communistic régime. He proclaimed that Russia was the only emancipated country in Europe, that it had given to the nations the mould of government, the pattern of economics, the social ideal in realization; and that henceforth England and France and Germany and Italy and countries overseas must set their watches by Moscow's clock.

And make no mistake about it, it is a skilled lecturer who graces the platform. Shaw is an

old hand at this business. He has been on the socialistic platform ever since the hour of his conversion to that doctrine. He has proclaimed the tenets of socialism from carts and nearly every soap box in London. He has made speeches for it, written articles about it, published books on it. It tumbles out in his casual talk, it colors his philosophy, it streaks all his plays. There is no half and half business in this, no sharing. It's clean cut, absolute, and all absorbing.

Yet it is superfluous to say that Shaw's is a comfortable sort of socialism that is not suffered to invade the domain of his practical life. Shaw is a rich man, a very rich man. He married rich. His royalties on his plays are stupendous. A two thousand word story by Shaw on anything, from fairies to the love-life of a cootie, would be snapped up by an American magazine at thousands a snap. His income is princely. In the conservation and increase of that income Shaw is more Scotch than Irish; what he gets he holds. So far as the record goes, Mr. Shaw has never made an effort to equalize fortunes by cutting off even the thinnest slice of his own. There's just this one thing about his relation to his money that the public is permitted to know: when the Parliament, in its endeavors to balance the budget, hikes the income tax rates in the upper brackets, Shaw is the most vocal protestant of them all and his

squalls can be heard from Land's End to the Scottish border. Shaw the writer rails against Yankee dollar-idolatry and labels us a nation of money-grubbers; Shaw the man is as thrifty as a French peasant, holds as much in reverence a ha'-penny as a Catholic a holy wafer, and in unquiet days stuffs his mattress with gold notes rather than with socialistic dreams.

It is difficult to speak in moderation about Shaw's religion and that not because of his denials but his irreverence. The man is wholly without regard for the faiths or the feelings of others. He has no more sense of awe than a bearded goat. Here is a sample, "I shall never have any real influence," he says, "because I have never killed anybody and don't want to. And yet when I die and go to heaven I shall feel bound in intellectual honor to say to God: Scrap the lot, Old Man, your human experiment is a failure. Men, as political animals, are quite incapable of solving the problems created by the multiplication of their own numbers. Blot them out and make something better."

Now I do not think we have any right to demand Shaw's acceptance of our creeds but I do think we have right to demand that he be decent, and no decent man, no man with decent regard for the beliefs of others, even if he holds them

false, has license for such outrage. Here is a harlequin who to secure a laugh would slap the soul of his grandmother or tweak the nose of a cherubim.

Of course Mr. Shaw feels that he has right to take privileges with the god of his own creation. Following Ibsen he believes in a Life Force, whatever that is, and that man should be in harmony with that Life Force and be used of it, though unhappily he has yet written no primer for us groundlings telling us how it may be done. However, if we blunder it is no more than the Life Force does, for Mr. Shaw informs us that *his* God "makes mistakes."

Shaw's conception of Jesus is as shallow as his conception of God and is soaked with irreverence. Shaw's strictures on the church are of a piece with his whole Mephistophelian attitude toward things religious. It is one caricature after another. "Unfortunately this Christian church has become the church at which you must laugh; and so it is giving way to that older and greater church to which I belong: the church where the oftener you laugh the better, because by laughter only can you destroy evil without malice."

Here is a characteristic bit:

Matthew was a man of books, a chronicler. Luke was a sentimental romancer. John was a man of the

world and a politician, with a turn for magic and metaphysics, not unlike Paracelsus. Matthew took it for granted that Jesus belonged to the haughty classes; had socially correct views as to the Gentiles; and was offensive, as a matter of course, to those who disagreed with him. Luke made an operatic tenor of him and gave him charming manners.

Now this reveals only intellectual dishonesty. These characterizations are not true to the facts and Shaw must know that they are not true. He is so drunk with the wine of his own conceits that for the sake of astounding he would degrade the noblest figure in human history; that to mint one spurious coin of novelty, or turn a pretty phrase, would convert the Temple of Judgment into a dance hall, the cross into a Maypole; and for the vulgar display of his rapier wit would wound the Sacred Heart.

Shaw called Jesus an arrogant madman who scorned to defend himself before Pilate and Caiaphas because he believed that when they had killed him he would rise three days later and reign in glory over them. I agree with Frank Harris that "humanity will think of Jesus standing dumbly before Pilate, and worship him, long after everyone has ceased to care whether George Bernard Shaw stood anywhere."

If Shaw lives at all, lives beyond the bounds of this generation, if there be in him the smallest

seed of immortality, that ongoing life, that expanding seed, is in his dramas.

On being told that he enjoyed an enviable reputation in America Shaw said, "Which? I am a philosopher, novelist, sociologist, critic, statesman, dramatist, and theologian. I have therefore seven reputations."

Here, at least, is one man who has right to use always the editorial "we." There are seven of him. But it reminds us of Wordsworth's poem, in which the little maid, in response to the question, "How many are in your family?" replies, "We are seven," though there are only two at Conway, while two are at sea and three are in the churchyard. Stringing out the comparison, only the critic and the dramatist are alive under the shavian roof; the philosopher and the economist are at sea; the novelist, statesman, theologian are in the churchyard. Shaw as a philosopher is but a brewer of a broth of oddments snatched from the works of a half dozen of the more radical philosophers of the day; Shaw the statesman is a Will Rogers in his dotage; Shaw the sociologist is a carnival boat in a tempest, mastless and wallowing in the waves. Shaw the novelist has no more vitality than last year's snake skin; Shaw as theologian has no more commandingness than Henry Ford as a historian, and his one mistake was in sending his theolog-

ical effusions to staid quarterlies instead of the rollicking Punch. Shaw as both critic and dramatist has respectable proportions, but when he conceives himself a modern Michelangelo having pre-eminence in seven fields, in his attempts to attain the heroic, he is ridiculous.

Of the critic Shaw I have already spoken; at Shaw the dramatist let us have a closer peek. The list of his plays is a long one: "Arms and the Man," "A Devil's Disciple," "Androcles and the Lion," "Candida," "You Never Can Tell," "Man and Superman," "Blanco Posnet," "Getting Married," "The Doctor's Dilemma," "Saint Joan." And that is just getting started. Manifestly the briefest criticisms and analyses of these plays would be quite beyond the limits of this lecture. Nor shall I attempt the sketching of even a single play. But what shall we say of the playwright and of his dramas as a whole?

I am sure that none of us can think them quite so good as Shaw held them. Writing of "A Devil's Disciple," I think it was, he said, "If this isn't better than Shakespeare may it be damned properly." There can be no doubt but that Shaw held that Ibsen had quite out-moded Shakespeare and as Shaw had climbed on Ibsen's shoulders he had not the slightest doubt that his horizons stretched far further than the horizons of the Bard on the Avon.

Not that he would take any credit to himself for such thought-pre-eminence. It was the hand of God, or the Life Force, or Fate, or whatever else, outside himself, may be. Shaw informs us that he never won anything through struggle. In his own words, "I never struggled upward. I gravitated." That's it. He never crawled, he never climbed upward, he just gravitated. Shaw has a boundless ambition. He writes Miss Terry that this ambition to succeed almost consumes him, but there's no mounting the ladder, rung by rung, for him. He kicks the ladder downstairs and goes upward by sheer levitation.

But did he rise far? That's the quest I wish I had a riper wisdom to answer. So far as I can make it out, Shaw's genius is unlike a star, which spurning the feel of earth mounts up to join its fellow-watchers in the sky. It is more like a captive balloon whose swelling sides and pretty lights catch the eyes of a circus crowd, but which, after all, never gets far from earth, never ceases to feel the tug of the captor rope, which, when midnight comes, is yawningly pulled down by the roustabouts and at season's end is laid away in the property room.

By all this I mean that "The Doctor's Dilemma" and "Man and Superman" are not quite up to the levels of "The Rivals" or "Midsummer Night's Dream." In every one of Shaw's plays

there is cleverness—the man is diabolically clever —there is a wit that crackles, there are fresh winds blowing, there are cacophonies of a boisterous humor, there are flashes of insight and twists of psychological novelties, but the marks of greatness we miss—beauty, nobility, music.

Save phrasing which has the artistry of hand-rubbed literature, an unmistakable brilliance of pen, the beauty of Shaw's dramas is most in evidence by its absence. Shaw received at one time the Nobel prize for literature and commenting on the year in which it was awarded him he observed that it was the year in which he had written nothing. So while here and there are dainty bits in mass, his plays never reach up to the levels of beauty. There are few if any lovely characters in Shaw's gallery, Candida, perhaps, and in a way, Saint Joan but as a whole his men and women lack allure. Shaw doesn't spend as much time as did his master, Ibsen, either in the dissecting room or the morgue, but he did spend a lot of time in the clinics and many of his characters are pathological exhibits and reek with iodoform. Shaw in his lifetime has met perhaps as many splendid men and women as any other man of his generation, but his dramas are crowded with men of the lewder sort and half his women have only the fascination of a mousetrap.

Try this out for yourself. How many of Shaw's characters—men or women—did you ever fall in love with? For myself, when through dramatic compulsion he brings some of his heroes or his heroines to their dying, instead of mourning at the bedside I'm only minded to tell the author to hurry up with his strychnine and make ready for the undertaker.

As for his lines they've got just about as much chance as Ben Hecht's for the anthologies of tomorrow. Lacking beauty they also lack nobility. Some of his master's (Ibsen) characters reveal strength. Brand, for example, is a towering figure, big with the bigness of Norway mountain ranges, narrow, bigoted, hard, unrelenting, brain-befuddled, dream-addled, hating, hateful, yet somehow appealing. But no such Mount Blanc of a mind rises in Shaw's pages, rather little ant-tunneled, spite-breeding foothills.

Do you say this is realism? That Shaw painted men and women, cauliflower-eared, slit-mouthed, pudgy-nosed, pimpled, warted and fishy-eyed, just as they are? It is just this that wakes my dander. If Shaw had said, "Ladies and gentlemen, these little manikins I now present you are children of my own creation, fathered by my spleen, mothered by my bile, having no likeness to any two-legged creatures that walk the earth; accept them as my humble contribution to the Noah's

Ark of fiction," we should as such accept them! But when he says, "Now that you have done with that old doddering Shakespeare and want no longer to see make-believes, but the real article of flesh and blood; now that you want to see men and women, not as they move in Windsor Woods, or in the dream-forests of Arden, but as they really are, walking down Piccadilly or Edgworth Lane—here are my creations, so real that if you do not move over to the other side of the walk they'll knock you down in their passing"—when he says that, and then turns out a mangy, scurvy lot of men and women emitting a shower of shavian sparkles, marching to the music of his brassy rhetoric—well, Mr. Shaw, as wit, as columnist, you stand at the head of your class, but as for the verisimilitude of your characterizations you are a flop.

How is it, then, that Shaw is the most successful playwright of his day? It is in spite of the things I have mentioned and because of other things that have not yet been catalogued. Shaw has a sound sense of dramatic construction, he has sting and liveliness and novelty and whimsicality, a keen understanding of the business of a play, and a fertility of invention that constantly amazes. All in all, despite his limitations he is one of the greatest dramatists of today. Yet for

all that his plays are not the solid stuff of literature.

You say Shaw's plays are all timely, hitting off the follies, portraying the trends of his day. That is just the trouble with them. They are too timely. They are too enmeshed in the contemporary and, the fashion of their day changing, they die. Running through them all there is no deep note of timeless things. You say they deal with the actualities and the practicalities of life. They do. And that too is their weakness. For the actual passes and the practical, but the ideal and the dream abide. A pump is a practicality, a Beethoven symphony would never draw a drop of water from the well, but the symphony will outlast the pump.

No, it is my considered guess—as a mere splinter of a critic's chip I have no license to do other than guess—that George Bernard Shaw will not last. His work is too earthy to withstand the sure dissolvings of the years. Springing from the dust of Time, to Time's dust it will return. Eternity's light is not in its eyes, eternity's dews are not on its brows. In the cool appraisals of the long tomorrows Shaw will be but an exploded rocket, a rocket not without pulse flutterings, in the stir of its skyward rush, but spent and broken in the morning light, only a little part of the vast

litter of the world, while men whom Shaw berated, whose obituaries he composed, whose funeral orations he pronounced, the Beaumonts, the Johnsons, the Coleridges, the Shakespeares, will be as stars, clear shining, in humanity's sky.

MOORE, SYNGE, AND YEATS—AN IRISH STEW

When the critics tell us that the greatest literary revival in the last hundred years is the revival of letters in Ireland and that since 1890 the greatest cultural contributions to the world have been made by Irishmen, it would seem that none of us should be wholly ignorant of the goings on in that green-hilled land. We have been so given to associating the Emerald Isle with bogs and peats and gnomes and clowns and fairies and embryonic American policemen that it is almost a shock to read that within the last few decades bludgeons have blossomed and shillalahs sprouted into song.

What has brought about this sudden revival?

Some say that it is synchronous with and in part grows out of the revival of Gaelic, the original tongue of Ireland. (You are aware that in Ireland, just as in Wales, there is a widespread effort to cast not only literature in this Gaelic form but even to bring Gaelic back as the spoken language of the people, as indeed, in both countries, in the more provincial sections it already is.) Others have said that this burst of bloom is due to the revival of the nationalistic spirit, a spirit that, long stirring, came to intense activity at the

close of the last century, wore down even British bulldog opposition, and resulted in Ireland's separation from England and the establishment of the Irish Free State.

But after all, it is more important to know what literature was produced by this renaissance than to know something of the revival itself.

Who are some of these Irish writers?

To begin, George Moore.

George Moore is one of the supreme writers of our day. His prose has at once the substance of a tapestry and the fluidity of running water. It's a prose to sing and chant and endlessly admire. His technique is as flawless as his matter is degrading. As an example of Moore's style, of its seductiveness, even when he is dealing with such a mundane thing as dress goods, take this:

> Lengths of white silk, clear as the notes of violins playing in a minor key; white poplin falling into folds statuesque as the bass of a fugue by Bach; yards of ruby velvet, rich as an air from Verdi played on the piano; tender green velvet, pastoral as hautboys heard beneath trees in a fair Arcadian vale; blue turquoise faille Française, fanciful as the twinkling of a guitar twanged by a Wallian shepherd; soft draperies of tulle, delicate and resonant as the treble voices of children singing carols in dewy English woods.

The man could make a bolt of cotton into an epic. It is beautiful. It's too beautiful. It's too highly

perfumed for good taste and awakens the same aversion as a man coming into a company all drenched with oriental scents.

Moore is one of those Irishmen, like Wilde and Shaw, who would like to forget that he is an Irishman. In early life he left Ireland; landed in Paris; studied there; wrote there; saturated himself with Anatole France; nested in the Latin Quarter; gave up his Irish brogue for a Parisian accent; turned from Irish whiskeys to French wines and from Irish lassies to Parisian midinettes; kicked off his brogans and turned dandy; shed his religion and lived out in the rain; went back to Ireland to see if he would like it and found that he didn't; had as many love affairs as Solomon had wives; flouted all the conventions and kicked over all the moralities; is one of the few men who seem never at any time to have said "no" to himself.

Lest from this summary I be deemed not altogether enamored of Mr. Moore and therefore unfair, let the gentleman speak for himself. In *The Confessions of a Young Man,* an autobiographical sketch, after the manner of Rousseau's *Confessions,* he gives us these glimpses into his personality.

I am feminine, morbid, perverse, almost everything perverse interests and fascinates me.

Two dominant notes of my character—an original hatred of my native country and a brutal loathing of the religion I was brought up in.

A little bourgeois comfort, a little bourgeois sense of right, cry the moderns. Hither the world has been drifting since the coming of the pale socialist of Galilee: and this is why I hate him and his divinity.

But in the conclusion of this same paragraph his hatred relaxes enough to enable him to declare that Jesus, at least, is "picturesque."

Here is an evidence of his great tender-heartedness:

What care I that some millions of wretched Israelites died under Pharaoh's lash or Egypt's sun? It was well that they died that I might have the pyramids to look on or to fill a musing hour with wonderment.

Once more:

I am ashamed of nothing I have done, especially my sins.

But while Mr. Moore seems to be quite sold on himself he seems abundantly able to restrain his enthusiasm over others of his kind.

Humanity is a pigsty, where liars, hypocrites, and the obscene in spirit congregate. . . . Far better the blithe modern pagan in his white tie and evening clothes, and his facile philosophy.

He says: "I don't care how the poor live. I only regret that they live at all." His one desire is that he may die childless so

that when my hour comes I may turn my face to the wall saying, I have not increased the great evil of human life—then, though I were a murderer, fornicator, thief and liar my sins shall melt even as a cloud. But he who dies with children about him, though his life were in all else an excellent deed, shall be held accursed by the truly wise, and the stain upon him shall endure forever.

Mr. Moore confesses to just about all the villainies that might be charged against him, save of being a Prohibitionist, a Comstockian, or a Rotarian. In *The Confessions of a Young Man* he forsakes his broidered style and writes with a gusto and a bounce that would gladden the gizzard of Mencken himself.

Mr. Moore shows us in all his novels that men and women are only the puppets of environment and heredity forces and impulses, the strings pulled by the weather and the winds, the spirits of the serpent and the wolf, and men and women long dead, but he tricks out these manikins in new philosophical terminologies, so that the spirit—the spirit of the yesterdays—rides toward us on the current of what he calls "the vital forces." But high sounding "vital forces" or plain heredity, it's all the same in the end. The past shapes

us. The past so shapes us that by looking at the shape of a human head or by philosophic examination of hands and feet, you can predict what is going on in that head and what is going to happen to the man who has those hands and feet.

In "A Drama in Muslin" this determinativeness and compulsion of physiological structure is set forth with great particularity. The fates of all the women in this ménage are shadowed forth in their limbs and torsos. Alice has "thin arms and straight hips and shoulders," wherefrom Moore educes that she is predestined to "a life of dull conventionality and red-plush respectability." Olive has a bit more of curve and plenitude, and from an ocular and tactual survey of her sinuosities Mr. Moore concludes that while she is decorous enough to seek sense gratification within the bounds of matrimony she is out to snare a rich and titled nonentity for her husband. May Gould has even more of curve and rolling roundness, and is therefore docketed by Moore as a sensualist who will seek her pleasures where she will and snap her fingers at all bourgeois restraints. Cecilia, on the contrary, has no curves, only twists and thinnesses, whereby she is doomed to see life in Moore's high-sound phrase as "a libidinous monster, crouching in a cave with red jaws dripping with foul spume."

There you have it. Human conduct is but the reaction to their environment of scrawny arms or sloping shoulders, or rounded bosoms or bent spines. It's all fate, fate working through purely animal urges and passions, and Moore loves to paint his men and women not as when, on occasions, they are whipped up the heights, but as they are driven toward the depths. He never paints health, he only paints disease. He paints with rare artistry, as I have said, but the flush in the cheek of beauty is the flush of disease and the red that stains the lips of loveliness is the red of blood.

Moore's fiction is like a great hospital wherein are all kinds of sick folk, but where nobody ever gets well. *The Mummer's Wife* is a collection of nurses' charts recording the sure and steady disintegration of the character of the wife in the story and is the retelling of *The Rake's Progress,* only the rake is in petticoats. *Esther Waters,* perhaps Moore's best story, is the sordid tale of a servant to whom her lover is unfaithful. Its kitchen music is shot through with the staccato of the dice-clickings of the gambler husband and Esther's drunken hiccups. *Sister Teresa* is the recital of the multiple liaisons of a prima donna who ends up in a convent wherein a temporary continence may sharpen the edge of dulling desires. *The Lake* is the only story in which the

curtain does not ring down upon absolute futility. Yet, plainly, this exception is made only to shock. A priest falls in love. Shall he be true to his vows or run away with the girl? That's the question. Here the lake comes in. How many a story of despairing love ends with a plunge into merciful waters—a momentary struggle, a futile gasping, then black oblivion. True to form the priest stands at the water's edge. There is the great debate. It ends. The priest plunges. But he doesn't plunge to die. He plunges to swim, to swim across that lake on whose green thither side there is the girl.

Moore's skepticism grows, in part, out of his perception of nature's vast indifference to the human lot. How insensate, insensitive nature is. But Moore was not the first or the last man to make the discovery. All of us have known the dark and the cold of this shadow. I read in books that the trees are friendly and yet I know that if my heart should break not a single tree would shed a single leaf in its compassionating. I have read that the sea is kindly and yet I know that if I were drowned in its depths today the winds would dance as merrily on its green waves as if those waves were not a tomb. I have read of the gentlenesses of the earth, and yet I know that its grasses would clasp my coffined body no more tenderly than a buried bomb. Yes, nature is in-

different. Wherein then can we find satisfaction? In the realization that we are somewhat different from nature, are above nature, have, as nature has not, a brain and a heart, and that this nature is our servant and not our master. Man is nature *plus*—plus *human* nature, and in that plus is meaning and mission. If you say we came from apes lay the emphasis not on the *apes,* but on the *came.* We are not apes *now* and by all the laws of light, why should we try to live on ape levels?

But to get back to Moore. When Moore's book *The Brook Kerith* came from the presses I read it, and though somewhat immune to shock, I had the sensation of acute discomfort. In this story of the life of Jesus, Moore has done what no modern of any intellectual stature has stooped to do before. He crowned the Christ not with thorns, but with ridicule. He piled blasphemies on those gentle lips. There is no newness of attack on the person of Jesus — nothing original — Moore's mind for all its troublings over many things was never pained by the birth of an original thought —but there are grotesqueries of interpretation and vapidities of imaginings.

Jesus, in Moore's story, pretty closely following Renan's *Life of Jesus,* reduced to bare outline, is a weak sentimentalist who, carried away by the acclaims over some of his sermons, con-

ceives himself to bear some special relation to the Most High. For this assumption and for his socialist doctrines he is nailed to the cross. But he doesn't die on the cross. He is stolen from it by his disciples and in the home of Joseph of Arimathea recovers from his wounding. Afterward, by the brook Kerith, Jesus reviews his life and comes to the conclusion that he was mistaken in all his high claims, that he is only as all other men are, and before a group of the Essenes he admits his mistakes and confesses his sins. But here comes in the crashing drama. Paul, converted on his way to Damascus, has been preaching the gospel of the Risen Lord. Returning to his native country he chances to be in that group before which Jesus makes the confession. But Paul will not believe it. He thinks he is listening to a madman and rushing forth from the assembly with even a more fiery vehemence lifts up again his song of the cross and the resurrection and ascension on high. And Jesus goes back to his dreaming and lets Paul have his way!

In this romanticism of interpretation Moore not only reveals his uncriticalness, but he bares the teeth of his blasphemy when he writes, "Jesus stood before the Cenoby . . . asking himself if any man had dared ask if God were not indeed the last uncleanliness of the mind." No, before

Moore, I do not think any man had ever asked himself that question. Nor since.

I have given so much time to Moore simply because his books are on many an American table and because, by the sophisticates, he is held to be the *dernier cri* of an emancipated mind. If I had to dismiss him with a single sentence it would be: He has the artistry of a Pater, the manners of a gigolo, the morals of the mating pens, and the odoriferousness of the animal cages.

In the forefront of Ireland's authentic writers is Padraic Colum. There is no time to dwell upon either his poems or novels, but I speak of him now just for the grateful contrast between him and Moore. Here is a real Irishman. He is close to the soil. You can smell the burning peat in his poems. The buckthorn blossoms in his lines. The real Irish folk find their voices in his fiction. He is no *poseur*, as is Moore. He is not decadent. He is not exotic. And above all he is a breath of the out-of-doors. He sings in "River Mates":

> I'll be an otter and I'll let you swim
> A mate beside me: we'll venture down
> A deep full river . . .

While I have no consuming desire to be the mate of an otter, yet after having been shut up with the fiction of George Moore, I do gratefully accept the invitation to swim in a "deep full

river,'' deep enough at any rate to give the cleansing of a bath. To the otter's invitation "Swim with Me''

> We will tear and eat
> Sweet-smelling salmon . . .

I give consent, not that I am so fond of tearing and eating raw salmon, but because I would rather feed upon Colum's fish but lately jumpingly alive than upon Moore's fish too long dead.

Next comes Synge.

Synge in his poverty and early hardships reminds us of the tragic early years of that greater poet, Francis Thompson. In his wandering all over Europe, paying his way by playing on a fiddle, he is not unlike our own Vachel Lindsay, who turned tramp and wandering round over the country repaid his hosts for hand-outs and haystack shelter by reciting some of his own verse. Yet all with a difference. Francis Thompson makes you wonder how an angel could starve; Vachel Lindsay's gusto of rolling declamation sets your feet to dancing; Synge cannot set bow to strings without waking weird, troubling music in your heart. Those who have right to pronounce upon his style say that it derives alike from Loti and Anatole France. I only know, that like Yeats and like Loti—all of whose books I have devoured—it is very beautiful. It is as rich

as cloth of gold and swift as a bird on the wing. Synge is pre-eminently a dramatist, and his dramas seem to grow out of the Avon hills, the tarns and cromlechs, the fantasies of faëry folk, the hard doings of the peasants, the dreams of old men and women, and the tragic tones of fate's chorus and the mockeries of the high gods.

I said a moment ago that Synge's music is troubling. The characterization holds. Celtic melancholy breathes upon his harp and the minors of the strings shake the soul. There's a cry in the music and seldom a laugh. The Irish are pictured a gay people, when they are not painted as clowning or as buffoons, but gaiety is seldom a characteristic of Irish bards. Ireland's folk songs if they be not hilarious and rollicking are soaked in sadness. Mostly they are sentimental, but through nearly all of them thread the notes of disillusionment and loss. John McCormick singing "My Wild Irish Rose" or "Kathleen Mavourneen" starts the tear. There's hardly a lark in Erin but sings with a thorn in its throat. In Synge this national melancholy finds poignant accentuation. He is the singer of lost battles, the voice of a dream that is never to be born into the world. Synge sees no meaning in life, therefore, no need to strive. Why strive to row against the current, seeing that the very river itself is to be swallowed up by the sea, with

not even a remembrance of how, one time, that river fretted the shore or bore ships on its bosom?

In his three chief dramas, unless *Deirdre* is to be reckoned, *Riders to the Sea, The Will of the Saints,* and *The Playboy of the Western World,* this sense of the futility of all things crops out not only in the dialogue but in the very substance of the plots. In *Riders to the Sea* Old Maura—and Synge is as fond of old men and women for dramatic purposes as is Hugh Walpole—a peasant woman has six sons who all go out to sea. And one after another they are lost. It is always so. Whenever any of Synge's characters put themselves against nature's forces they lose. Nobody ever wins out in Synge's pages. These six sons battle against the sea and the sea sucks them down. And the sea hears no moan of the men who go down and the sea chants no requiems over their deep-laid beds. This is the ultimate depth of depression. The sea doesn't know what it does. Nobody knows. Nobody knows anything. In the whole universe there is neither tongue nor ear, nor brain, nor heart. It's all a welter of insensate matter, the struggle of blind forces. Through infinite aeons stars have been flung out, and suns and moons and planets and continents, seas and lands and elephants and mice, and grains of sand and germs that frolic in the blood streams of a fly, but nowhere is there hint of purpose. All

these multitudinous voices, oratorios of constellations and buzz of gnats, prayers of men in great cathedrals and whine of the east wind, are poured alike into the ear of nothingness.

One beauty, though, Synge sees though it be only the beauty of utter loss. After her sixth and last son goes down at sea Old Maura pours out:

> They're all gone now, and there isn't anything more the sea can do to me. . . . I'll have no call now to rise up crying and praying when the wind breaks from the South and you can hear the surf is in the East and the surf is in the West, making a great stir with the two noises and they butting one on the other. I'll have no call now to be going down in the night and getting Holy Water and I won't care what way the sea is when the other women will be sorrowing.

Yes, when you've already lost everything you can't lose anything. Even fate can't snatch anything from empty hands.

In *The Will of the Saints* Synge sprays his mockeries on what we commonly conceive the blessings of life. He tells us there is not only ugliness in what we have called our trials and our hardships, but even in what we call our blessings. In this play Synge tells us of two old blind beggars, Martin and Mary Doul, who are set to wondering about how each of them looked and whether the world be as beautiful as they have been told. A saint comes conveniently along and

in answer to their prayers they both receive the gift of sight. But they didn't like what they saw. The world was not so beautiful to their vision as it had been to their dreams. And though I don't think Synge tells us about it, I have no doubt that Mr. Martin Doul was not discovered by Mary to be quite the Apollo Belvedere which, to Mrs. Mary Doul, he had pictured himself, and that Mrs. Mary Doul was not quite up to the Venus she had caused herself to be envisioned by Mr. Martin Doul. On the whole they were disappointed with the show and the saint again opportunely arriving to chat with them for a moment, they begged of him to let them go blind again. The gift was granted and they grew quite lyrical in their appreciation of their recovered darkness:

I'm thinking it is a good right ourselves have to be sitting blind, hearing a soft wind turning round the little leaves of the spring and feeling the sun and we not tormenting our souls with the sight of the gray days and the hogmen and the dirty feet trampling the world.

But Synge's satiric genius is not content with making us hopeless and sad, it also makes us ridiculous. He not only sends us all to the cemetery to weep over the graves of our dead illusions, our hopes and our loves, but he claps dunce caps on the heads of the mourners and makes them

titillate to the quips of the clown. In *The Playboy of the Western World* he represents Christy Mahon, a young blade, bursting into a village on the coast of Mayo with the astounding news that he had just killed his father, had cleft his skull with an axe. And what comes of it? Instead of being repelled the villagers all come to take a very great interest in Christy. He has done an unusual thing. He no longer suffers from any inhibitions. He has not been cramped by self-suppression. On the contrary he has expressed himself. Quite out of the common ruck. An individualist. He's a coming young man. The village all points to him with pride. Pegeen Mike, the tavern keeper's daughter, loses her heart to him. The Chamber of Commerce urges him to give an address on "The New Way to Solve the Problem of the Over-Production of Men"; The Sons and Daughters of I Will Arise ask him to lead their procession. The brotherhood of that great fraternity, the Mystic Knights of the Sea, solicits his membership. The Browning Society invites him to read a paper on "The Psychology of the Fratricide." The Boosters Club hugs him hilariously to its bosom and tells him that as a go-getter he is a regular Abou Ben Adhem, his name leading all the rest. In a word, Christy is sitting pretty. And then, unfortunately Christy's father comes rumbling into town in his model T

Ford and although there is a slight wound on his head he tells the by-standers that he got it from cranking his car. Now this is not exactly the way Synge tells it, but it does no violence to his story. Then what? Christy loses all his distinction. The young men no longer are proud of his company, Pegeen quits loving him. The Chamber of Commerce, Browning Club, Sons and Daughters of I Will Arise, the Brotherhood of the Mystic Knights of the Sea, all cancel their invitations, and Christy Mahon is no longer a white swan swimming in the silver waters of the smart set, but a plucked goose waddling in the barnyard. Of all this Stuart Sherman has said:

> Synge's comedies end in a kind of ironical bewilderment. His indeed is outlaw comedy with gypsy laughter coming from somewhere in the shrubbery by the roadside, pealing out against church and state and man and wife and all the ordinances of civil life. . . . You will find the gypsy call in every one of Synge's dramas except *The Riders to the Sea* . . . the dramatist himself is in secret heart a vagrant and his inmost vision of felicity is purposeless vagabondage.

Life was without meaning, man's only comfort that life would soon end. Synge under the golden light of the oaks of Glencree found compensation only in the assurance that "in the end black boards would cover him and he should lie with worms eternally." Enough of Synge.

William Butler Yeats is one of the most commanding figures of our times. You know of nobody like him. Dreaming, mystical, he is, perhaps, more like William Blake than any poet you know. Of our Americans, if it were not for the curled eyelashes and strawberry stained cheeks of her verse, I should venture to say there is some likeness to him in Edna St. Vincent Millay.

Yeats has made his mark in poetry, in the drama, and in fiction. He is a romanticist and his dreams are pierced with varicolored lights. He is a stylist, and so much of a stylist that the long trailing gowns of his verse sometimes impede the movement of his thought. His poems are delicately beautiful but not seldom lacking sufficient starch of an idea to stand up. Yeats' religion is as elusive as some of his verse. It is recorded of him that one time crossing a river when his boat threatened to capsize he fell on his knees and began to pray. But it was a strange prayer. It began with "O Lord, of man's first disobedience and the fruit of the forbidden tree whose mortal taste brought loss of Eden and all our woe"—and as much more of Milton's *Paradise Lost* as he could recall.

While he seems to have been a pretty poor Christian he was a real patriot. He labored for everything he held to be for Ireland's good. But patriotism he saw, real patriotism, would exact

a terrible toll. Ireland cared only to be saved at a price. In one of his plays, *Cathleen Hi Houlihan,* he represents Michael, a young peasant who is about to be married, as approached by an old woman and urged to leave his affianced and go forth to the wars. But there is no concealment of the cost.

> It is a hard service they take that help me. Many that are red cheeked now will be pale cheeked; many that have been free to walk the hills and the bogs and the rushes will be sent to walk hard streets in far countries; many a good plan will be broken; many that have gathered money will not stay to spend it; many a child will be born and there will be no father at its christening to give it a name. They that have red cheeks will have pale cheeks for my sake.

It is a beautiful passage.

In the handling of *Deirdre,* a bit of Ireland's legendary lore, we may test the comparative craftsmanship of Synge and Yeats. Both writers tried their hands at the shaping of this legend and two noteworthy three-act plays are the result. Both are beautiful. Synge perhaps more faithfully portrays the Gaelic spirit, its pensiveness, its melancholy; Yeats rises to more heroic levels, gives more of action, bears us on a fuller tide to a tragic ending.

There are passages of surpassing loveliness in Synge's play, lines like these: "The lightning it-

self wouldn't let down its flame to singe the beauty of her." . . . "Maybe from this day I will turn the men of Ireland like a wind blowing on the heath." Naise, saying to Deirdre, "And it is you who go around in the woods making the thrushes bear a grudge against the heavens for the sweetness of your voice singing."

There are biting sentences like these:

"Queens get old, Deirdre, with their white and long arms going from them and their backs hooping. I tell you it's a poor thing to see a queen's nose reaching down to scrape her chin."

There's pathos in this word of Deirdre,

"There's no place to stay always. . . . There are as many ways to wither love as there are stars in a night of Sanhain; but there is no way to keep life or love with it a short space only. . . . Who'll fight the grave, Conchubar? . . . because of me there will be weasels and wild cats crying on a lonely wall where there were queens and armies and red gold, the way there will be a story told of a ruined city and a raving king and a woman will be young forever."

And there's heartbreak in the old nurse's moan with which the play ends,

"Deirdre is dead and Naisi is dead; and if the oaks and stars could die for sorrow it's a dark sky and a hard and naked earth we'd have this night in Emain."

But for the pounding pulse and the red blood of real drama turn to Yeats' version.

Time—the Long Ago. Prologue: An aging king of Ireland, Conchubar, falls in love with a beautiful girl, Deirdre. They are betrothed. But a month before the wedding day, a young man, Naisi, the son of Usna, in the laughing scorn of his youth woos Deirdre and carries her off. The king is wroth, but after seven years, besought by one of his courtiers, Fergus, offers pardon and safety to the errant pair. The curtain rises on a guest house in a forest. Two wandering musicians have come to this house and are recounting this story. Fergus, the king's courtier, arrives and tells the musicians that Naisi and Deirdre are coming to that house where they will be met by King Conchubar with pardon and with welcome. That pardon, Fergus says, was hard to come by.

> Yet after I had urged it all seasons,
> I had my way and all's forgiven now.

But just then dark faces of men without are glimpsed through the windows. Who are they? Says one of the musicians:

> Forgive my open speech, but to these eyes
> That have seen many lands, they are such men as kings will gather for a murderous task.

But Fergus scouts the idea of the king's treachery:

He is my friend,
I have his oath and I am well content.

But disturbing rumors come to the little group —rumors of treachery, rumors of a bridal chamber that has been made ready in the king's house. Deirdre senses impending peril to her in this rumor. Is the king still in love with her? Will he tear her from her husband? Has that bridal bed been made ready for her?

O Mover of the stars
That made this delicate house of ivory
And made my soul its mistress. Keep it safe!

At last comes a messenger from the king, with this greeting:

Supper is on the table, Conchubar
Is waiting for his guests.

A dramatic pause and the messenger continues:

Deirdre and Fergus, Son of
Roigh, are summoned;
But not the traitor that bore off the queen.
It is enough that the king pardon *her*
And call her to his table and bed.

Treachery! Fergus remonstrates, says he has the king's promise, but the messenger says:

I am Conchubar's man
I am content to serve an iron tongue,
That tongue commands that Fergus, son of Roigh
And Deirdre come this night into his house
And none but they.

So they are brought to the king's house. Naisi in white rage rushes out from the guest house to slay the king, but is taken captive by Conchubar's guards.

Speaks the king:

One woman and two men; that is the quarrel
That knows no mending. Bring in the man she chose
Because of his beauty and the strength of his youth.

Naisi, entangled in a net, is dragged into the royal presence. To him Conchubar says:

Although her marriage day had all but come,
You carried her away; but I'll show mercy.
. . . . . .
I will not make a bargain; I but ask
What is already mine.
. . . You may go free
If Deirdre will but walk into my house
Before the people's eyes, that they may know
When I have put the crown upon her head
I have not taken her by force and guile.

Deirdre:

Oh no! Not that, not that!
Ask any other thing but that one thing.
Leave me with Naisi, we will go away
Into some country at the ends of the earth,
We'll trouble you no more; and there is no one
That will not praise you, if you will pardon us.
"He is good, he is good," they will say to one another;
"There's nobody like him, for he forgave Deirdre and Naisi."

But Conchubar is stone to her plea. Deirdre turning to Naisi says:

It is better to go with
him.
Why should you die when one can bear it all?
My life is over; it's better to obey,
Why should you die? I will not live long, Naisi,
I'll not have you believe I'll long stay living;
Oh no. No, no! You will go far away,
You will forget me, Speak, speak Naisi,
Speak,
And say it is better that I go.
I will not ask it. Do not speak a word.
For I will take it upon myself.
Conchubar, I will go.

Naisi:

O eagle! If you were to do this thing,
And buy my life of Conchubar, with your body,
Love's law being broken, I would stand alone
Upon the eternal summits and call out,
And you could never come there, being banished.

Then Deirdre kneels before the king:

Pardon us.
I know that you are good, I have heard you praised
For giving gifts and you will pardon us,
Although I cannot go into your house.
It was my fault. I only should be punished.
The very moment these eyes fell on him
I told him; I held out my hands to him.

How could he refuse? At first he would not—
I am not lying—he remembered you.
What do I say? My hands?—No, no, my lips
For I had pressed my lips upon his lips,
I swear it is not false—
Until I woke the passion that's in all,
And how could he resist? I had my beauty.
You may have need of him, a brave, strong man.
. . . . . .
You may have need of him, for you have none
Who is so good a sword or so well loved
Among the common people . . . . You say,
"I am Conchubar—I have no need of him."
You will cry out for him some day and say,
"If Naisi were but living"—*(She misses Naisi)*
Where is he?
Where have you sent him? Where is the Son of Usna?
Where is he? O where is he?

Conchubar:

The traitor who has carried
off my wife
No longer lives.

Nor did Deirdre live long thereafter. With a knife, plucked from one of the musician's hands, she does herself to death. Says Fergus looking on her still form:

King, she is dead; but lay no hand upon her,
What's this but simply cage and tangled wire
Now the bird's gone?

Nobly for once and at the last spoke Conchubar:

> I being King,
> did right
> In choosing her most fitting to be queen.

There are many others not mentioned in this lecture who are contributing to this literary renaissance in Ireland, but there is no time even for the recital of their names. If in this sketch you have missed the gaiety and the pathos that like twin springs break from such familiar songs as "Killarney," "Come Back to Erin," "Kathleen Mavourneen," if you have missed the wit and drollery that rise from the Celtic genius as naturally as bubbles from the uncorked bottles of Burgundy's vintages, the fault is in Moore and Synge and Yeats and not in the sketch. That a smile is not on the lips of these poets is no food for wonder. The true poet is the singer in whose verses lives the mood of his people and until now the heart of Ireland has been heavy. For centuries and centuries the shadow of England has rested upon Erin and foul things and cruel things and tear-compelling things have sprung up in that shadow. Until a decade or so ago Ireland's clanking chains were the same chains that the American colonies threw off in 1776. And slavery means sadness. The Irish are a proud people and no matter though the yoke they wore was

cushioned, as they walked behind England's triumphant car, it was a heavy yoke and you can expect no exultant songs save upon the lips of the free.

But now that the night has ended and the day has come we may look for a literature less streaked with sorrow and for the coming of happier days. Wilde, Shaw, Moore, Synge, Yeats are the first fruits of that literary revival, tangy, acrid, but with sounder, sweeter, mellower fruits that are yet to come.

Given a happier Ireland we shall have happier Irish songs.

EUGENE O'NEILL—CHIEF AMERICAN PLAYWRIGHT

Eugene O'Neill is among playwrights what Whistler is among painters, a dealer in black and white, mostly in black. It was a significant day for the American drama when this New Englander came into the world, about forty-five years ago. What bloodstrains have done for him we can only conjecture. What college did for him was inconsequential. But what five years of world-wandering did for him we know.

First, we find him as a clerk in New York, then successively, an assistant theatrical manager, a gold prospector in Honduras, a voyager to South America and South Africa, a seaman on the American Line, traveling everywhere. We see him turning his hand to all sorts of occupations, mingling with all sorts of people, but chiefly with draymen and longshoremen and sailors and miners and gamblers and bartenders and roustabouts and derelicts of land and sea. He saw life on its seamiest side—in its hardest and unloveliest conditions—and these visionings set their seal upon his subsequent work. The brand of his wanderlust is on all his plays. More than any other contemporary dramatist he deals with the sea, and like another Conrad, with the sea in its sul-

lenest moods. O'Neill is the voice of its treacheries, the degradations of its ports, the banalities of its sailormen, its loneliness and its rage. Above all he is the celebrant of its mysteries, its torturings, its unmarked graves.

His advent as playwright was nearly twenty years ago. A hardy band of actors summering at Provincetown came down to Greenwich Village, New York, converted an old barn into a theatre, and began the presentation of plays, primarily for the intellectuals—plays, in the main, of revolutionary cast and intent which the established theatre consistently ignored. For the little theatre O'Neill's plays were written and there they were first produced. It's the story of the mousetrap told over again. The discerning world soon beat a pathway to the barn. O'Neill's genius was quickly recognized and proclaimed and today he stands first among American dramatists; his name has blown across far seas to far lands. The one-time sailorman has received his accolade in all the capital cities of the five continents of the earth.

What shall we say of him? If we speak truth, we must acknowledge his genius. He has insight, verve, dramatic skill, reinless power. His plays crash through to given goals with the irresistibleness of fate. To see or read one of his dramas is not to be amused or entertained, it is to be

shaken to soul's center, to be disturbed, upset, stabbed through and through. It is not soon forgotten. Its bitter taste is on the tongue for many a moon. Stark as Pikes Peak and as hard as stark. Evermore on our memories is its inescapable frown.

Yet with freest acknowledgment of O'Neill's genius, I feel that ignorance of his plays is bliss rather than loss. It is not that his ships have insufficient ballast, it is that their cargoes are too rankly odorous and that the sour of the hold is stronger than the salt of the sea.

To begin, O'Neill introduces on the whole the most scabrous lot of characters that ever slithered across the written pages of drama or cursed their way across the mimic boards. If in all that motley there is a single decent hero or feckless heroine I do not recall it. It is chiefly an assemblage of ineffectuals, hypocrites, knaves, lechers, thieves, pimps, perverts, prostitutes. There's hardly a streak of nobility in all of his mannons, there's not one of his Cabots but is in need of a deodorizer. In *Gold*, the whaling ship carries the reek of a carrion crew. The only halfway tolerable character in *Emperor Jones* is the scheming, sweating Negro, Brutus Jones. *The Hairy Ape* has nothing nobler than its gorilla. Study the characters in *The First Man* and you would be quite resigned to the thought that you

have done with "The Last Man." Subnormal, erotic, warped misshapen, the entire *dramatis personae* repel rather than attract, and there is not a single Adam's brat among them all whom we want to meet again.

This may be art but it is a twisted art. Admitting that there is fidelity of portrayal, why should only distorted souls be painted? Granted that there are such things as cesspools and sewers, is it a sane art solely to uncap the sewer or expose the wiggly, grubby things of the cesspool? By implication to say that this is all?

O'Neill puts into the mouths of his characters the coarsest, ugliest words in the English tongue. There is hardly a rose-word in his vocabulary. O'Neill can write beautiful English, but his plays are as barren of loveliness as a Sahara, with hardly a single oasis of green and charm.

It will not do to say that this drabness is an artistic necessity, that only such words fit the tongues of his characters. Hugo dealt with the underworld, Dickens lounged in the fish market, Conrad gives us the talk of the fo'c's'le, Galesworthy and Hardy and Priestly have companied with nit wits and yokels, but in all the patter of their patois and their wreckages of grammar there run threads on which winsome words are often strung. O'Neill writes of a provincial New England village, Barrie of a provincial Scotch

village; but while Barrie puts pearls into the mouths of his villagers, O'Neill puts mud. There is much of the poet in Eugene O'Neill. Yet in his pages is the constant prickle of prose. In the main, the speech of his characters, to use a southernism, is just "plain onery." They clump and claw their way through dialogues, long and short, but in the scrape of their heavy boots there is no music. There is no call for such ugliness. It is not a necessity of strength. Shakespeare's English is strong, but it is not ugly, even his gravediggers spout poetry.

O'Neill in his penchant for the abnormal, makes too much of insanity. Some of his plays seem to have derived from the madhouse. The gibber of the insane is in more than a half-dozen of them. It is so in *Isle*. It is so in *Strange Interlude*. Here, again, O'Neill is false to life. Insanity is in the world but it is the exception rather than the rule. It isn't fidelity to fact and it isn't service to art, to make every tenth man a maniac and people the world with lunatic ghosts.

If it isn't insanity, it's suicide. O'Neill's favorite punctuation mark is the crack of the pistol. *Tragic Endings* is the story of a wireless operator who has become deaf. Burdened with the support of a family, and fearful that should his affliction become known he would lose his job, he conceals his deafness and retains his post. Re-

sult, a train wreck, and the operator commits suicide. *Recklessness* ends in suicide. In *Mourning Becomes Electra,* Mrs. Mannon commits suicide, Orin commits suicide. In *Before Breakfast* the ending-suicide is not witnessed by the spectators; Alfred Rowland kills himself behind the curtain, and his death is announced by the drop, drop, drop of blood. Here again O'Neill is false both to art and fact. Suicides we have with us but they are in the slim minority. Self-slaughter is not unknown, but is not on the minds of many men.

If it isn't insanity or suicide, it is sex-obsession. The shadow of this abnormality is on nearly every one of O'Neill's dramas. They are not merely sex-scented, they are sex-soaked. Granted that sex is one of the driving forces of life, it is not the only driving force. But this sombre dramatist is not content with sex-obsession, he will be satisfied with nothing less than sex-perversions. In *Desire Under the Elms,* Eben is the lover of his father's wife and the father of her son. In *Mourning Becomes Electra,* Orin, with the fateful Oedipus complex, is first his mother's then his sister's lover. As psychological studies of abnormalities O'Neill's plays are no doubt worth while. If you like the close atmosphere of the dissecting room, O'Neill's your man.

Given such scalawag characters as he creates, given insanities and suicides and sex-obsessions and sex-perversions, there is no need to say that in these plays there are no happy endings. How could there be? There are hardly any happy beginnings and before even the second act is well under way loathly forms begin to crawl across the stage and we hear the faint, far-off flappings of vulture wings.

This, I take it, is the final falsity: Some life-endings are tragic, but not all. Some suns do go down behind the clouds, but not all. Humanity is not always broken on the wheel. These unrelieved disasters of life's closings are as false as the invariably happy endings of the romantic school. It is not fair to fact. This is not realism, it's a leprous romanticism, a romanticism that ought to be compelled, as lepers of old time, to stand aloof from the highways frequented by men and cry out to all who come near, "Unclean, unclean."

Beyond the Horizon is not only the play that marked O'Neill's arrival as one of the most commanding of American playwrights, but remains until now one of his greatest achievements. In brief, it is the story of the longing for the unattainable, of the curse of maladjustments, of the futility of human striving. A New England farm near the seaside. Two brothers, Andrew and

Robert Mayo, and Ruth Atkins, a neighbor girl with whom both the brothers are in love, are the principal characters in this drab story. Andrew has farm instincts, loves the soil, is content with home. Robert loathes the farm, finds chiefest joys in books and dreams—dreams of the sea and far-away places—beyond the horizon. Happily the uncle is a seaman and Robert has procured a berth on his ship for some distant voyage.

Enter Ruth, who upsets the whole program, as is woman's immemorial way, ties Robert, the dreamer, down to hoe and sod, and packs Andrew, who also loves her, off to sea.

Several years go by and the curtain lifts to disclose an all-inclusive disintegration. The farm, under Robert's management, has gone to pot, fences are sagging, the house is in disrepair. Robert is seedy and sick, Ruth is fretful and tired. Love's fever has burned out. Marital bonds are chafing. Worse than that, Ruth through these years has been idealizing Andrew, has been comparing his successes with Robert's failures, and has convinced herself that the great mistake of her life was in her choice of Robert, not Andrew.

Andrew comes back. But his coming is only to disillusion Ruth, who has persistently conceived him as her lover. "I want you to believe," he tells her, "that I put all that petty nonsense

back of me a long time ago, and now—it seems—well—as if you'd always been my sister." "Sister!" Having said which, he goes back to South America.

Other years pass, but the family keeps sliding downhill. Outward poverty is matched by spiritual destitution. Anger no longer flames. Only cold ashes are on the hearth. Robert is desperately ill. Their little girl is dead. "Mary's better off being dead," Ruth says to her husband. He agrees. "We'd all be better off for that matter." Nor has Andrew fared much better. He comes home with a story that he has lost his millions through gambling. "You, a farmer," says Robert, "to gamble in a wheat pit with scraps of paper? There's spiritual significance in this picture, Andy. I'm a failure and Ruth's another—but you're the deepest-dyed failure of the three—you've spent eight years running away from yourself." Failures, all failures. The curtain comes down on a dead Robert and upon an Andrew charging Ruth with the crime of her husband's death. "You murderess!"

What's the lesson? Is it that if things had gone otherwise, if Robert had gone to sea and Andrew stayed on the farm all would have been well? But there is no suggestion that if she had married Andrew she would have lived more happily. The tragedy of the brothers' lives might

have been rooted in their maladjustments, but why should an innocent and amiable girl have her life so twisted and distorted? It's logical to picture a farm as degenerating but it's plain surplusage to have killed off the child. This sordid sequel did not derive from Mayo blood nor from misplacement in career. It derived from the sombre-spirited Eugene O'Neill. The bleakness of the farm is not in the bleakness of New England landscapes but in the soul of the dramatist. Ruth becomes shrewish and wanton-minded, murderess, not through the compulsions of her environment, but through the compulsions of her playwright-creator.

In *The Hairy Ape* the curtain rises on the forecastle of an Atlantic liner. Tiers of steel bunks, three deep on all sides. The ceiling presses down upon the men's heads—for there are men in that steel cage. They cannot stand upright. They must half-stoop as they shovel the coal into the furnace. The effect sought after is a cramped space in the bowels of the ship. The bewildered, baffled defiance of a beast in the cage. In this grim steel prison, among shouting, cursing men, is the Hairy Ape. On second look, though covered with sweat and grime and soot, the Ape turns out to be a man. He even has a name—or had—Robert Smith. But so long has he been

called "Yank" that even his name, as his past, has been almost forgotten.

Though the favorite pose assigned him by O'Neill is that of Rodin's "The Thinker," this Neanderthal man finds thinking a difficult job. "I want to tink," he says, again and again, but it's hard for Yank to "tink." So far as his "tinking" is revealed, the sum is just about this, you either "belong" or you are of no account whatever. So far as Yank can "tink" it out, only those who do the rough, hard work of the world "belong." To "belong" you must be ruthless and savage and strong.

> Say, what's dem slobs in the first cabins got to do with us? We are better men dan dey are, ain't we? Sure. One of us guys could clean up de whole mob with one mit. . . .

Delving deeper, Yank concludes that he is just about the only man who does belong, that everything rests on him, everything begins in him:

> Only for me everyting stops. Get me? De noise and smoke and all de engines movin' de woild, dey stop. Dere ain't nothin' no more. Dat's what I'm saying. Everyting else dat makes de woild move, somep'n makes it move. It can't move without somep'n else. See? Den you get down to me. I'm at de bottom, get me? I'm de end. I'm de start. I start somep'n and de woild moves. I'm de ting in coal dat makes it boin. I'm steam and oil to de engine. I'm

de ting in noise that makes you hear it. I'm smoke and express trains and steamers and factory workers. I'm de ting in gold dat makes it money. And I'm what makes iron into steel. Steel. Dat's for de whole ting. And I'm steel, steel, steel. I'm de muscles in steel, de punch behind it.

But while Yank is ranting, an epical something else is happening on the ship. An aristocratic young woman of the first cabin has made up her mind to go slumming on the ship, to see, as she puts it, "how the other half lives." She wants to go down into the bowels of the ship and see the stokers and how they get on. Her aunt tries to dissuade her, the ship officers try to dissuade her, but Mildred has a mind of her own and has her way. Under the chaperonage of the first mate of the ship she goes down into the ship's dark and eventually into the engine room. To Yank, this vision in white is a being come down from heaven. But while he is struck dumb by her beauty she sees in Yank only a horrible deformity and gasping, "The hairy ape," falls into a swoon. Mildred is carried out of the engine room but the poisonous phrase she has flung at Yank has gotten into his blood. "Hairy ape," that's what she called him, "hairy ape." No indispensable man as he had pictured himself, no man at all, only an ape, a hairy ape. Soon after, he learns that this smooth snob, who has so de-

spised him, who had shrunk from him as from a monster, is the daughter of the president of a great steel corporation.

Her "old man"—president of the steel trust—

makes half de steel in de woild—steel—steel to make her rich and cage me in for her to spit on—cages, cells, locks, bolts, tiers—dat's what it means—holdin' me down, with him on de top, but I'll drive trou—fire, dat melts it, I'll be fire—under de heap—fire dat never goes out—hot as hell—breakin' out in de night.

The ship comes into port. With Paddy, he goes out to see the sights of the city. Smug-looking people are pouring out of the churches; they sniff at him and pass on. To that world he does not "belong." He hears of a revolutionary society and joins it, but he discovers that it is revolutionary only in its talk. He doesn't "belong" there. After jail-experiences he wanders at last into a zoo and ends up in front of a cage, in which a gorilla is peering through the bars. The gorilla fascinates Yank, he feels somehow a kinship with the prisoner, for is not he too of the four-footed—"hairy ape"?

But while their lots are largely alike, Yank feels that the gorilla has the better of it:

Say, you're some hard lookin' guy, ain't ye—only you're lucky, see? You don't "belong" with 'em, and you know it, but me—I belong with 'em, but I don't, see? Dey don't belong with me—dat's what. I ain't

on oith and I ain't in heaven, get me? I'm in de middle tryin' to separate 'em, takin' the woist punches from both of 'em. Maybe that's what they call hell, huh? But you, you're at de bottom, you belong. You're de only one in de woild dat does, yuh lucky stiff!

Seized by a sudden whimsy, he takes his "jimmy" from under his coat and forces the lock on the cage door and throws the door open. He cries to the gorilla, "Pardon from de governor, step out and shake hands. I'll take ye for a walk down Fifth Avenoo. Come on, brother." The gorilla scrambles out of the cage, but suddenly enraged, with a spring, he wraps his huge arms around Yank in a murderous hug. The crackling of crushed ribs, a gasping cry from the man —still mocking. "I'm trou. Even him didn't tink I belonged."

Mourning Becomes Electra is at once O'Neill's latest play, his best and his worst. In my judgment—and I am acquainted with each and all of O'Neill's major plays—it is in many ways his strongest. Words are beggared in any attempt to set forth its sheer compellingness. Six or seven hours of it, yet you cannot tear yourself away from its dismal unfoldings. From first to last it is the flap, flap, flap of black wings; yet those flappings hold you beyond the bright rustlings of angel pinions. It is the fascination of

sheer horror. The beady eyes of the albatross in Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner," are as nothing to this malign magnet.

Yes, it's strong, but it is not wholesome. It is not lacking in unity, but it is the unity of diseases. Since time began, there has been nothing to match this assemblage of twisted souls and twisted destinies. The House of Mannon never rested on the granite of reality. It has foundations only of the morbid fancies of Eugene O'Neill. Like another Dante, he leads you to the lowest hell, but unlike Dante, he leaves you there. All the intelligentsia to the contrary notwithstanding, to say that all men live in hell and live in hell all the time, is to lie.

I have neither time nor inclination to follow all the windings of the story. Its ending is foretold in the very characters O'Neill sends on the stage. Ezra Mannon is cold, stern, inept, ineffectual in his loving, and is foredoomed to lose his wife. Christine Mannon, beautiful, sensuous, was born to trouble. She falls in love with an outcast Mannon, known as Captain Brant, murders her husband for his sake, runs away with him, and after his death commits suicide. Lavinia, the daughter, is a replica of her mother, disguising the likeness while her mother is alive, but blossoming into another Christine after her mother's death. As a reaction from her repres-

sions she has an affair with a native islander. Orin, the son, was by temperament not so much born into the world as damned into it. Captain Brant is a roué and not above making love to Lavinia the daughter, while paying court to the mother. Then there is the smirching, unctuous parson and his conventional wife, the gossipy, inquisitive, mouse-smelling neighbors, and what have you? A scurvy lot. What's the story in a dozen words or so? Ezra Mannon, as has been said already, had a wife only in name. For her love of Brant, Christine, his wife, poisons Ezra. Orin, the son—and here you begin to touch pitch that is the real thing—loves his own mother unnaturally, and with his sister Lavinia, tracks her to Brant's ship into which she has surreptitiously gone—and kills Brant, whereupon Christine, Orin's mother, sends a bullet through her own brain. Pretty sordid, but the bottom is not yet reached. After his mother's death Orin transfers his unnatural love of his mother to his sister. It's the Oedipus complex overlaid with yet another complex of the abnormal. Three deaths we have already, Mrs. Mannon's suicide, Ezra Mannon's and Brant's murder. But there is yet another to come. Orin, who in spite of his unnatural attachments to mother and sister, cherishes a flickering love for Hazel Niles, hounded by remorse, having revealed to her his murder

of Brant, his guilty love for his sister, puts a pistol to his head and blows out his own tortured life. Only Lavinia is left of this happy family. She acquaints her lover, Captain Peter Niles, with her partnership in Brant's murder and then, from him and from all, withdraws herself henceforth to live and to die—alone!

These are not flesh and blood characters. These are but pitiful puppets pulled by the strings of heredity and fate. The Mannons all go wrong, for one thing because of the Mannon blood. The portraits of the dead Mannons, hanging on the wall, look down on the living Mannons, and more and more the faces of the living become like the faces of the dead.

The Mannon face, the Mannon blood, you can't get away from them. Lavinia says to Orin, "The dead have forgotten us, we've forgotten them." But it is not all so quickly rubbed out. Later, Lavinia is dismissing Peter with these words, "Go home—marry someone else, love isn't permitted to me, the dead are too strong." The dead are too strong and the strong are dead. "It takes the Mannons to punish themselves for being born." The dead Mannons are against the living Mannons, circumstances are against the living Mannons, God is against them. "Why," asks Christine of Hazel, "can't all of us remain innocent and loving and trusting?—but God won't

leave us alone. He twists, and wrings, and tortures our lives with other lives, until—we poison each other to death." All things are against life. That is the dismal story. The curtain falls not upon a cry—"the damned don't cry," says Orin—but upon a boarded-up house whose sole occupant is a woman with a heart of stone—not upon a broken heart—a heart broken may come whole again—but a heart that no longer feels anything at all.

Such a drama! There's nothing in all literature to surpass its unrelieved gloom, its sordidness, its clutching tragedy. Greek dramatists sometimes dealt in much the same material O'Neill uses, but there is a nobility, an epic quality of courage in their characters which our modern playwright never matches. In the Greek tragedies, just as in O'Neill's tragedies, fate is unrelenting, implacable, but its victims fall at the thrust of clean swords. In O'Neill's drama, fate's victims die ignobly, and the stench of their rotting bodies is in the nostrils of the world.

Emperor Jones at its beginning seems to be in an altogether different vein from O'Neill's other major plays. It gives promise of plain farce. It is like moving out from the crime-bespattered front pages, the profundities of the editorial pages, the welter of the book-review page, and the chatter of the society page, into the open

air of the comic strip. In its beginning there is the crackle of mirth, the broad grin of the jokester.

"Emperor Jones" is Brutus Jones, the southern Negro, who, breaking out of prison, becomes a stowaway on a liner, and, at last, drifting into African wilds, associates himself with a Negro tribe. By his superior cunning he becomes its leader and is elevated to the throne. Emperor Jones! The Emperor is talking to his confederate, Smithers, a crafty, ferret-eyed scalawag white man:

Ain't I de Emperor? De laws don't go for me. You heah what I tells you, Smithers. Dere's de little stealin' like you does and dere's de big stealin' like I does. De little stealin' gits you in jail sooner or later, for de big stealin' dey makes you Emperor and puts you in de hall o' fame when you croaks.

Smithers reminds the Emperor that he pretends to the Negroes a belief in a lot of things in which he doesn't believe.

"Shore, I pretends, dat's part o' de game. Ef I finds dem niggers believes dat black is white den I yells it out louder 'n dere loudest."

When Smithers tells him that he cannot always fool the Negroes, and that, soon or late, they will turn against him, the Emperor promptly declares that he knows it:

Was you thinkin' I'm aimin' to hold dis job down for life? No, suh. What good is gettin' money ef you stays back in dis raggety country? I want action when I spends. An' when I see dese niggers gettin' up dere nerve to tun me out and I'se got all de money in sight, I resign it on de spot and beat it quick.

Upon the ears of the two conspirators falls an ominous sound! From the distant hills comes the faint, steady thump of a tom-tom, low and vibrant. Explains Smithers, "De blacks is holdin' a bloody meetin'. Havin' a war dance. Gittin' dere courage worked up before dey start after you."

"Must be a mighty big drum to carry dat far," says the Emperor. "So long, white man. Feet, do your duty."

Brutus has crossed the plain in safety and just at nightfall comes to the edge of the great forest. It is a forbidding place. Darkness is over it and the nearest trees stand out as enormous pillars of a deeper blackness. A sombre monotone of wind lost in the leaves, moans in the air, yet this sound serves but to intensify the impression of the forest's relentless immobility, to form a background throwing into relief its brooding, implacable silence. Well nigh spent, Brutus throws himself on the ground and listens to the never ceasing, rhythmic beating of the tom-toms. "Bush niggers," he spits out, "wonder dey wouldn't git

sick beatin' dat tom-tom. Seems louder-like. I wonder if dey's startin' after me."

The drum is bad enough, but there is worse to come. From the deeper blackness of the forest creep out the Little Formless Fears. They are black, shapeless, only their glittering little eyes can be seen. If they have any describable form at all, it is that of a grub worm about the size of a creeping child. They move noiselessly, but with painful effort, striving to raise themselves on end, failing and sinking prone again. From these formless horrors comes a tiny gale of low mocking laughter. As they squirm toward the terror-stricken Negro he lets out a yell of madness and yanking out his pistol fires at these formless things. They disappear. Brutus goes crashing through the underbrush, and coming into a little open space, finds the Negro Jeff, a former buddy, sitting on the ground, playing craps. But, alas, it isn't Jeff in the body, it's the ghost of the Jeff whom in the long ago Brutus had murdered. Brutus fires at the ghost and the ghost disappears. Meanwhile the beat of the tom-tom continues in an ever accelerating pace. Brutus, half-crazed, rushes on to come to another figure in the black woods, that of the guard at the prison whom Brutus in his escape from the prison, had killed. But that too is only a ghost. "I killed you, you white debbil. If it's de last ting I evah

does, ghost or debbil, I kill you again." He fires. The ghost of the guard is merged in an onrushing darkness. Brutus plunges on through the undergrowth but he can't get away from the past. Yet other ghosts rise up to chill his blood and draw the last bullet from his pistol. And he can't get away from the drum. It increases in sound and rapidity of beat. It draws nearer and nearer, with an evermore insistent triumphant pulsation. His enemies envelop him. In the blackness they creep closer, the ring narrowing and narrowing, until at last there is a fusillade of shots and the triumphant yell, "We've catched him. We've got him! Him dead." There is one word of relief in this fearsome ending. Brutus had bamboozled the blacks into the belief that he could be killed only by a silver bullet, and that as he was the only one among them who had a silver bullet, he was invulnerable. Remembering this, they had moulded silver bullets for this man hunt, and it was by silver bullets that he was killed; which moved the renegade Smithers, to say, as he looked down upon the shapeless huddle that once was Brutus, "Silver bullets, blimey, but yer died in 'eight of style, any'ow."

In a previous study I have spoken of Edna St. Vincent Millay's studio in a great tree top on a New England hill. Where is O'Neill's studio? On a mountain top, where thunders growl, and

minds moan. From that high-pitched place of gloom rush down the harpies of morbid fancies and befoul the viands that are spread on the tables of the world. Let men believe O'Neill's dreary gospels, let them believe that the life of a human is always the life of frustration, of sordidness, of unavailing regrets, and they have uncaged the gorilla who will enfold them in his mighty hug, crack their ribs, squeeze out their breath, break their backs, and besplatter their dead bodies with his drool.

I have never seen any of Eugene O'Neill's plays. I never want to see one. I have read nearly all the plays that, until now, he has written. I shall never read another—unless, unless he shall cease his burrowings in the abnormal and turn his unquestioned genius to brighter uses. He has built prisons enough, God knows; let him now build some palaces of delight, and if not palaces, then simple homes where life shall be no longer a smother, but a song.

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